

Town Of Candia
Budget Committee Meeting
Unapproved Minutes
November 18th 2024
Town Hall Meeting Room

The Municipal Budget Committee meeting was called to order at seven o'clock on November 18th. The attendees recited the Pledge of Allegiance.

Attendees:

Lynn Chivers, Chair
William Saffie
Susan Gill
Katrina Niles
Ryan Young
Susan Young, (Selectman's Rep)
Stephanie Helmig, (School Board Rep)

The chair reminded everyone to state their names before speaking to ensure clarity in the minutes. The first order of business was to approve the minutes from the previous meeting. A member noted that there were some changes needed in the minutes, including a correction to the spelling of a name and the addition of page numbers. Lynn pointed out a spelling error regarding Jeff Webold's name, which should be spelled W-E-B-O-L-T. Lynn also mentioned a correction needed in the third page's second paragraph regarding the Smith family, and that the minutes did not reflect a motion made during the previous meeting. The chair confirmed that the minutes would be sent to the Webmaster after approval. A member raised concern about how motions were recorded in the minutes, suggesting that it should specify that cuts were from the proposed increase to the police department's budget to avoid confusion. The committee moved to approve the minutes as corrected, with Ryan making the motion and Bill seconding it. The vote resulted in six in favor and one abstention.

The committee then shifted focus to the school budget, with no additional questions about the town budget.

A member inquired about a 3% cut from the proposed town budget, but there was no information available from the department yet.

The chair noted that section four of the school budget was missing, which contains salary changes. The committee discussed how to approach reviewing the school budget, deciding to go through each section methodically. Members were reminded that the purpose of the meeting was to ask questions, not to vote, with voting scheduled for the following Monday.

Bill Saffie raised a question regarding the transportation costs included in the budget, specifically asking if the high school amount included busing. Bill calculated the average cost per student for busing and noted that there should be a breakdown for high school transportation.

The committee discussed the need for clarity in the transportation budget, particularly regarding regular education and special education transportation costs.

A member expressed concern about the accuracy of dividing the total budget by the number of students to determine the cost per student, especially with special education costs included.

The discussion continued about the costs associated with students attending Pinkerton Academy, with calculations provided for the total cost and busing.

The committee discussed the DOE-25 report, which provides the cost per student for education, and the importance of using accurate figures for budgeting. The conversation concluded with a consensus to gather more detailed information from the SAU regarding the cost per student and transportation breakdowns for further review.

Discussion about bringing materials to a meeting and answering questions during that meeting. The participants agree to review the information together afterward.

A participant seeks clarification regarding the budget, specifically about school board services and SAU services, totaling \$682,000. They are directed to section seven of the budget for details.

Ryan Young asks for clarification on what SAU stands for, which is explained as Supervisory Administrative Unit, covering the districts of Candia, Hooksett, and Auburn. The SAU handles various administrative functions, including HR and payroll, which are not managed by individual school principals.

Ryan inquires about the value received for the budgeted amount of \$205,000 for SAU services. The discussion reveals that the total budget for SAU services is \$1.4 million, with a breakdown of costs for each district. The conversation shifts to the structure of the SAU and its board, which includes representatives from the three districts. They discuss the voting power of the board and the implications of budget increases, including contractual obligations that contribute to a 10% increase in costs. Lynn Chivers expresses confusion over the budget figures, specifically the \$476,000 total for SAU services, and clarifies that the default budget is \$205,000. The participants discuss the breakdown of principal services and the overall budget structure. The group discusses the number of employees at the SAU office, estimating around 15 to 20 staff members, including various administrative roles. Ryan Young asks if there is a state-level oversight for SAUs, to which it is clarified that the state education department oversees them, but each SAU has its own board made up of representatives from the member districts.

The conversation returns to the 10% increase in the SAU budget, with participants speculating that it may be due to contractual obligations related to salaries and benefits. They discuss the implications of these increases on the overall budget.

Concerns are raised about the high costs associated with maintaining the SAU, especially in relation to the number of students served. The discussion highlights the financial burden of administrative costs versus the benefits provided.

The participants compare costs between their district and Pinkerton Academy, noting significant differences in per-student costs. They discuss the implications of these costs on the budget and the quality of education provided.

The conversation touches on the possibility of private pay for students wishing to attend their district, with some skepticism about its feasibility. The group decides to refocus on the budget discussion, suggesting a more methodical approach to reviewing the budget items rather than jumping around.

Questions arise regarding the salary increases for the principal and assistant principal, with participants seeking clarification on whether these increases are contractual or based on performance.

The principal's salary increase is confirmed to be part of a multi-year contract, while the assistant principal's contract is noted to be yearly. The discussion emphasizes the importance of these contracts in determining salary adjustments.

The conversation shifts to dental insurance costs, with participants noting discrepancies in budgeted amounts from previous years and discussing the potential reasons for these changes.

The group reflects on past budgeting errors and the impact of previous administrators on the current budget situation, emphasizing the need for accurate forecasting in future budgets.

The discussion returns to the salaries and requests for additional teaching staff, with participants clarifying the nature of these requests and their implications for the overall budget. Discussion revolves around the contract schedule and the request for an additional teacher. The current number of teachers is deemed sufficient, but there is a need for an additional teacher due to the way the school organizes its blocks. A PowerPoint presentation was made by the principal in June, outlining options for structuring the school day, which the school board voted on, favoring the option that includes hiring an additional teacher.

The conversation shifts to the number of teachers per student or grade. It is noted that there are no assistant teachers available, only a few parent volunteers. The number of sections and classes is discussed, with a focus on whether hiring another teacher is sensible given the current student numbers. The PowerPoint presented to the board included three choices for structuring the day, with the selected option being a middle-ground solution that would accommodate the sixth graders.

The need for an additional sixth-grade teacher is confirmed, which would help with the breakdown of subjects like social studies, language arts, and math. Enrollment trends are mentioned, with a slight increase in student numbers, although high school enrollment is down. Class sizes are small, with 12 students in both fourth and fifth grades, prompting the suggestion to increase the number of teachers to maintain manageable class sizes.

The discussion touches on the low number of paraprofessionals available, which is surprising given the needs of the students, particularly those with Individualized Education Programs (IEPs). The comparison is made to other districts, indicating that the number of paraprofessionals in their district is significantly lower than in others.

Questions arise regarding salaries, specifically a 20% increase for paraprofessionals that was voted on in a previous town meeting. It is clarified that this increase is included in the budget and is in addition to their existing contracts. The conversation then shifts to substitute teacher salaries, with a request for a full-time substitute being discussed, which would require an additional budget allocation.

The need for a full-time substitute is emphasized due to difficulties in finding substitutes when teachers are absent. The current budget includes a request for \$50,000 for a full-time substitute, which is seen as necessary given the challenges faced in hiring substitutes. The conversation also highlights the importance of having certified teachers available to ensure quality education.

The high school enrollment numbers are reviewed, with a noted decrease in students attending. The discussion includes the impact of under-budgeting in previous years and the need to adjust for current enrollment trends. The conversation also touches on the state-mandated increases in certain budget items, which are not under the school's control.

The topic of trust funds is raised, with a mention of approximately \$250,000 available for emergencies. It is noted that this fund has not been used recently, as there have been no significant unexpected costs. The funds are intended for emergencies, particularly in special education, and the current budget does not account for potential new students who may require additional resources.

Extended school year programs for special education are discussed, with confirmation that they have been implemented in the past. The funding for the summer camp program typically comes from parents. The conversation also addresses the availability of services for English language learners and advanced learners, noting that support is provided on an individual basis rather than through a formal program.

The discussion shifts to guidance and psychological services, with a focus on the contracted psychologist who works two days a week. The cost of this service is approximately \$88,000 annually, and it is clarified that this is a contract position without benefits. The psychologist provides services to all students in need, including those placed in out-of-district programs, ensuring they receive necessary support.

Discussion begins regarding an increase noted on the side of a document, typically used to explain budget changes. The mention of "out of district" indicates a potential placement for students in different schools, possibly requiring additional funding. The conversation shifts to whether there are any out-of-district placements, with indications that there may be, as evidenced by a special education bus costing an additional \$75,000.

The group discusses the number of weeks in the school year, noting that teachers work 186 days while students attend for 180 days. The conversation transitions to various support services, including psychological services and speech therapy for middle and high school students. Occupational therapy services are also mentioned, along with staff development, which is described as contractual and budgeted for staff tuition.

A question arises about special education funding, specifically regarding the costs associated with paraprofessionals and resource rooms. It is clarified that there is a significant cost per student for

utilizing these resources, regardless of the frequency of use. The resource room is described as a supportive environment for students, particularly those with ADHD, where they can take tests and receive additional help.

The discussion moves to media administration and salary increases, with a noted 15% increase attributed to previous years' raises. The group acknowledges the need for raises due to low pay rates in the past. Questions arise about the wage pool and the potential for contractual changes.

The conversation continues with a focus on SAU services and principal services, with inquiries about the number of secretaries employed. The discussion highlights a long-serving staff member who has been with the school for 25 years, indicating the challenges of replacing such experienced personnel.

The group returns to the topic of media and maintenance, with a question about special education transportation costs. It is noted that the budget for special education transportation is significant, and there is a discussion about whether the district shops for rates among service providers.

The conversation shifts to information technology, where a notable increase in software costs is attributed to previously grant-funded items. A request is made for an itemized list of software used by the school, which is believed to exist and would provide clarity on expenditures.

The discussion touches on the fate of old computers after transitioning to Chromebooks, with a desire to know their current status. Questions arise about the principle of debt and how it relates to student services, with a focus on the financial implications of maintaining educational resources.

The group discusses the handling of excess funds at the end of the school year, noting that any surplus is typically used for projects approved in previous budgets. The conversation highlights the importance of understanding the default budget and its implications for future funding requests.

A question is raised about the allocation of excess funds, with clarification that these funds are not returned but rather used to offset the tax rate. The discussion concludes with inquiries about cost-of-living adjustments and step increases for staff, indicating ongoing concerns about budget management and staff compensation.

The discussion revolves around the impact of salary increases, specifically mentioning a cost of living adjustment (COLA) of 3% and an additional 2% increase that was approved through a warrant article. This results in a total increase of 5.5% for the year, which affects everyone's base salary, including teachers and paraprofessionals. The conversation highlights that once the base salary is raised, the subsequent increases will also be higher than they would have been without the initial raise.

There is a request for data regarding enrollment and budget over the past five years. The speaker suggests that the data should include the proposed budget, the approved budget, and the actual spending for each year. The aim is to analyze trends in enrollment and budget allocation, particularly in light of recent increases that have raised concerns about sustainability.

The speaker expresses confusion over the significant increase in budget, particularly an 8.5% rise, which seems disproportionate given the current economic climate and inflation. They mention that

the increase does not align with the town's financial situation and raises questions about the sustainability of such budgetary demands moving forward.

The conversation shifts to the need for a poll regarding the sustainability of the proposed budget increases. A show of hands indicates that no one believes that a 9% increase is sustainable. The discussion emphasizes the importance of budget committees in managing these financial concerns and ensuring that the budget remains reasonable and justifiable.

The dialogue touches on the rising costs of health insurance and other expenses, which are contributing to the budget increases. The speaker reflects on the perception that more funding for schools will automatically lead to better outcomes, questioning the effectiveness of such financial strategies. They emphasize the need for accountability in budget spending and the importance of scrutinizing every line item.

The topic of teacher benefits arises, specifically regarding tuition reimbursement. It is clarified that the reimbursement is for courses currently being taken, not for past education. The budget for tuition reimbursement is based on contractual agreements, and there is a discussion about the importance of utilizing these benefits effectively.

The meeting concludes with a discussion about the need for timely communication regarding budgetary matters. There is an acknowledgment of the complexity of school budgets and the importance of transparency in financial dealings. The speaker expresses gratitude for the opportunity to ask questions and emphasizes the necessity of understanding the financial implications of the decisions being made.

A motion is made by Katrina Niles to adjourn the meeting and William Saffie seconds. Everyone votes in favor.