

Weare Finance Committee Meeting Minutes

Wednesday, December 21, 2022

Present at meeting:

- Town Administrator: Naomi Bolton
- Finance Committee: Maria Fossiano, Thomas Clow, John Merva, Tom Flaherty, Elizabeth Evans, Bill Anderson, James Drury, Gary Evans (arrived late)
- Guest Speakers/Presenters: SAU 24 Superintendent, Dr. Jacqueline Coe and Business Manager, Christopher Roy

Chair Tom Clow (TC) called the meeting to order at 7:03pm.

Binder handouts were presented to the board members.

Jacqueline Coe (JC) began her presentation of the Weare School District (WSD) Budget, laying out current versus default and proposed budgets. Proposed budget is an increase of \$490,399, a 2.75% increase from 2021.

The big increase in the new budget is due to Special Education cost increases. JC explained wage changes and teacher position cuts, benefits costs reductions, retirement contribution decreases.

SAU funding contribution increased for Weare by \$468 over last year, due to SAU budget increase. This shifts automatically due to equalized value changes.

A number of accounting shifts have taken place to better align and categorize some spending accounts.

Repair and maintenance costs increased due to planning and the aging of the infrastructure.

Transportation costs decreased due to eliminating extra Kindergarten bus run.

Bill Anderson (BA) asked about the default budget, relating to positions that were not previously filled. JC explained the default budget calculation, highlighting that Special Education is legally required, and its cost increases are carried into the default budget.

Tom Clow (TC) asked about reduced Medicaid Reimbursement for Physical and Occupational Therapy.

Tom Flaherty (TF) asked what was driving Special Education costs. JC replied that Speech Language screening has a lower threshold (State standard), increased medical needs, more vision/audiology needs (statewide trend increase) and more IEPs. We have also had no out-of-district placement but are expecting one.

TF asked if any of this is related to COVID and whether we should expect this to drop off (if this is a bubble). JC said that she is sure it is since needs have increased across the state. JC said that we have one more year left on our ESSER grant, which offsets these costs, but they become part of the budget going forward.

BA asked if pending contract costs were built into the proposed budget. JC said they are not and that the only salary costs carried through are Speech Therapy (Special Ed).

BA also asked about the 2 teacher reduction and student-teacher-classroom ratios. He encouraged the SAU to carefully look at this ratio, as enrollment has reduced over time. JC explained that a class size of 20 is optimal and prioritizes smaller classes in younger grades.

Elizabeth Evans (EE) asked if additional certifications for Para-Educators could help offset contract services for Special Education. JC explained the Support Contract (which includes Paras), which focused on increasing wages, not benefits.

EC also acknowledged the reduction in the budget numbers since the earlier work session.

Gary Evans arrived at 7:37pm.

BA asked about the costs for each year of the 2-year Para contract.

Dr. Coe (JC) then presented the John Stark Regional School District (JSD) budget, laying out current versus default and proposed budgets. Proposed budget is approx. \$14.7m, a \$64,521 increase, 0.44% increase from 2021.

Two teacher positions were cut, and some accounting shifts took place in salaries. Benefits costs reduced. She explained that we contribute to staff retirement at JSD but do not in the Weare School District (WSD).

Tom Clow (TC) asked about support staff and how it differs from WSD. Christopher Roy (CR) explained the difference. TC asked how it relates to retirement contributions. JC mentioned that all support staff receive retirement benefits.

Tom Flaherty (TF) asked what CRTC was (Concord Regional Technical Center). JC explained the program, its cost and how many students participate, mentioning there are transportation costs associated with it and that it is partially funded by grants.

TF also asked about the use of servers in the school and whether they were considering more subscription/hosted servers. JC said that there has been a move to hosted services over the past 5 years.

John Merva (JM) asked about Federal ESSER funding. JC explained the 4 batches of this funding over time, due to COVID, which has been fully allocated and used by September 2024.

BA asked about student mental health services paid for by ESSER, and whether it will be built into future budget after ESSER expires. JC said she was not sure yet but that it was in the pre-COVID 2019 budget.

EE asked about transportation costs and whether it include only the driver or includes fuel and other costs. CR mentioned that we contract our busses, so it is a complete cost. EE also asked about the electric busses due to be provided. JC explained that these are to be given to the contracting company, not the SAU. EE also asked about transportation costs relating to CRTC and whether students should drive instead of using busses.

TF asked about savings from the JSD facilities lease program were entered into year ago.

EE asked about debt service bond schedule interest versus principle.

BA asked about snow plowing cost at Weare School District and whether we can reduce it, since we never seem to spend the budgeted amount. CR said that it was a good estimate.

BA also asked about referee costs increasing. JC explained that participation is going up, requiring more referee service.

EE asked about heating repairs increase, and whether the SAU has investigated alternative energy services. JC replied that is has not been a conversation with the board. CR added that the increase is partially due to account shifting in the budget. He also stated that he received advice that it was not worth considering at this time.

BA asked about funds returned to offset taxes. JC said that it was higher than usual since the SAU didn't hire enough people.

James Drury (JD) commended the SAU for keeping the budgets low but suggested they attempt to keep the budget flat, given the economic tone. JC said that the deltas could not be closed this year but suggest approving the proposed budget, since cost cutting measures would revert if the default budget passed.

Tom Clow (TC) discussed a few administrative items. He printed out and distributed minutes from the last three meetings, for committee approval at the next meeting (Jan 4).

He asked Town Administrator if the Town Warrant will be ready for the Jan 4th meeting. Naomi Bolton responded that it will not. As a result, the Finance Committee will instead discuss their preliminary findings on Jan 4 and review the town warrant on Jan 25th. BA mentioned that the WSD public hearing is scheduled for Jan 11 and the JSD public hearing is Jan 13.

Motion to adjourn by Elizabeth Evans, seconded by Maria Fossiano. Motion carried and meeting ended at 8:43pm.

Minutes Submitted by Tom Flaherty, Secretary 12/27/22