

Minutes of the

Weare Finance Committee

Wednesday, 7 January 2020

The meeting was called to order at 6:33pm.

In attendance were (from right to left as seen by the audience): Neal Kurk, Christine Hague, Matt Whitlock (secretary), Gary Evans, Megan Thellen, Tammi Hagman, Tom Clow, Lori Davis (chair), James Drury, Dennis Aubin, Keith Erf. Tom Downing and Nicole Herbst were absent.

Lori moved to approve the minutes from the previous meeting with amendments. The motion passed unanimously.

Jackie Coe, superintendent of SAU24, presented the John Stark School District proposed budget and warrant articles. John Stark School Board chairman Zach Lawson supplemented and answered questions.

- Three teachers are cut along with their benefits. The district had trouble hiring a Latin teacher so redirected students to Spanish and French and dropped the Latin program. A part-time French teacher was transferred to the middle school. One Spanish teacher was eliminated. Also there was a retirement in special education that was not replaced.
- The health insurance guaranteed maximum rate (GMR) is a negative 2.7%, largely due to census changes. This is the guaranteed upper bound of the change in health insurance costs, meaning costs will be decreasing by at least 2.7%.
- Warrant article to place \$200k of any budget surplus remaining at the end of the 2019-2020 school year into a new expendable trust for infrastructure and facilities (e.g., energy recovery ventilators on roof, roof work, track resurfacing).
- Warrant article to hire a School Resource Officer at approximately \$85k per year.
- Neal requested quantitative data demonstrating the efficacy of SROs.

Jackie presented the Weare School District proposed budget and warrant articles. Weare School Board chairperson Lisa Johnson supplemented and responded to questions.

- Salary increases result from approved collective bargaining agreements.
- GMR is negative 2.7%.
- Increases in special education transportation are included in the default budget because they are mandated by state statute.
- Increases in software expenses related to cybersecurity are included the default budget because they are mandated by state statute.
- Wendy Curry offered to send a spreadsheet enumerating the installed technology base at the Weare schools.
- Neal requested a history of standardized test scores with a view toward evaluating the effectiveness of spending on school performance.
- \$266k of the proposed increase is due to measures already approved by the voters.

- Warrant article to appropriate \$350k for full-day kindergarten (three teachers, three paraprofessionals, three classroom setups, and a playground), with \$192k to be raised through adequacy aid from the state and a further \$65k in savings due to transportation efficiencies. However, because state adequacy aid is based on student attendance in the prior year, Weare might not receive the full \$192k in aid in the first year. Due to space constraints at Center Woods, approving this article without building new facilities would repurpose the art and music classrooms, relegating those programs onto mobile carts.
- Neal requested a detailed breakdown of the full-day kindergarten cost items.
- Warrant article to appropriate \$75k for planning the construction of an early learning center to relieve the space constraints at Center Woods. A component of this plan might be to study the possibility of including SAU offices in the new building as a means of reducing the SAU district share costs born by Weare.
- There was a discussion about the need of the school board to appropriate the \$800k one-time windfall from the state lest it be “lost” and returned to taxpayers in the form of a downward spike in the tax rate that would make it very difficult to pass proposed budgets in subsequent years.
- Jeff Anderson, member of the Weare School Board’s facilities planning committee, offered to supply a spreadsheet of future anticipated capital improvements.

Lori clarified that Finance Committee members are free to solicit and gather information from town employees and officials without reporting back to the committee any information so obtained.

Weare Schools public hearing is on Wednesday, January 15, starting at 7pm. John Stark public hearing is on Friday, January 17, at 7pm in the cafeteria. Weare town public hearing is on Monday, January 20, at 7pm. The next Finance Committee meeting, which was previously scheduled for January 15, has been rescheduled to Wednesday, January 22, at 6:30pm, to deliberate the finalized town warrant. A further Finance Committee meeting to develop blurbs in advance of the deliberative sessions is scheduled for Wednesday, January 29, at 6:30pm. John Stark deliberative session is Friday, February 7, at 6:30pm. Town deliberative session is Saturday, February 8, at 9am.

Lori adjourned the meeting at 9:52pm.