

Alexa Garvey, Chairwoman called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m. in the District Office Board Room, Pawcatuck, CT. Members present were Jack Morehouse, Farouk Rajab, Craig Esposito and Heidi Simmons. Also present were Dr. Van Riley, Superintendent of Schools, Ana de Oliveira, Recording Secretary, members of the staff, and interested citizens.

Members Absent: Candace Anderson, Secretary, Alisa Morrison

Comments from Citizens Relative to the Budget

Susan McVeigh a paraprofessional commented on the paraprofessional union contract. She spoke on the inequity between the paraprofessional starting salary and other positions such as custodians, secretaries and laborer positions in the district. She also shared some of the duties of a paraprofessional outlined in the job description. She shared salary information from area districts comparing that to the district's current paraprofessional salary schedule. She noted that the contract is up for negotiations in the spring.

Blunt White commented on the narrative piece of the 2020-21 Budget document. He spoke on enrollment, administrative and secretarial salary increases for the past five years. He spoke of the increase of teaching costs. Mr. White voiced that the district could improve the budget narrative by speaking more on the actuals.

2020-2021 Budget Discussion and Direction

Dr. Riley spoke on the updates and changes from the last presentation of the budget. He added the increase changed from 3.05% to the current increase of 2.88%. We have a dean position that is going away and that person would bump into a teaching position therefore we were able to reduce one teaching position and asked the Board to move the 2020-2021 Budget forward at a 2.88% increase.

Gary Shettle, Director of Finance gave answers to the additional questions from the Board from the last budget presentation. The Board had questions regarding the maintenance, extra-curricular/athletics/curriculum, para salary and FICA budget lines. Chairwoman Alexa Garvey had questions regarding teacher stipend positions and if those were related to extracurricular positions. Mr. Shettle explained with the consolidation these positions and stipend amounts were revised to add new clubs and extra curriculum positions at both the middle and elementary schools.

Dr. Riley reviewed the staffing spreadsheet with information comparing staffing numbers from 2014-15, current and proposed numbers which was a request from Jack Morehouse. Chairwoman Garvey and Mr. Morehouse had questions regarding staffing numbers for the curriculum coordinator position and administrator positions. Dr. Riley explained the changes in staffing in these areas. He also noted there was a request for copies of attorney bills related to the FOI requests which will be ready by Monday.

Jack Morehouse spoke on the monthly expenditure reports and asked that in the event a budget line is over it would be helpful to have an explanation as to why the change in the budget line. Chairwoman Garvey asked this type of explanation be given on a regular basis. Dr. Riley agreed to work on the monthly reports to include explanations on overages. Mr. Morehouse feels there would be more transparency and it is people's money. Chairwoman Garvey asked to change the format of the monthly reports going forward.

Heidi Simmons commented on the rowing program at the high school. She spoke on the importance of the sport and her personal experience in the sport. She added colleges are aware on how rowing changes lives and that every year our rowing students are awarded scholarships from prestigious colleges. Her goal is to raise awareness on the Board of this sport. She spoke on the student attendance of the sport and the cost to students to participate in the sport. She inquired about how much per student rower and crew does the district pay relative to other sports. She feels this sport is underfunded and under stated. She hopes to have student rowers, coaches and interested community to come to the Board and educate them on this sport to then be convinced as a Board to better fund the sport of rowing at the high school.

Jack Morehouse spoke he feels that having a third administrator at the middle school is excessive. He spoke of his own experience when attending Stonington Public Schools and the number of administrators at that time and their duties. He asked if the district can do more job sharing or are there other staff that can handle those additional duties, so that the district can reduce to two administrators and use that extra funding to maybe give an increase to the paras. He added we could do more with those funds. He feels as a tax payer and as a Board member that an extra administrator at the middle school is not the best use of the money. Chairwoman Garvey also added coming into the budget season she had the same thought about the number of administrators at the middle school, but has changed her thoughts after Principal Tim Smith's presentation and recommendation to keep it for one more year and then reducing that position for the next year. Jack Morehouse spoke on the results of the climate surveys at the middle schools before the consolidation as it relates to the current school climate. He feels one more administrator is not what is best for the students, but making kids want to go to school and what makes kids super engaged is what is best for the kids. He noted his ideas are driven by what is best for the kids. Dr. Riley gave his recommendation regarding the administrator count at the middle school for the upcoming year. Mr. Morehouse acknowledged all the good things Dr. Riley has done at the middle school including the Encore classes. He compared the school size to other area schools and feels that money could go somewhere else.

Dr. Riley asked the Board for direction on the 2020-21 Proposed Budget with an increase of 2.88%. Chairwoman Garvey asked the Board if there were other opinions on the 2.88% proposed budget. She also commented that the para negotiations are after the budget season but hoped that their salary will include a comparable one to their position. Chairwoman Garvey noted the direction of the Board is to bring the 2020-21 budget to the February 13th meeting for approval.

Adjournment

The following motion was made by Craig Esposito and seconded by Jack Morehouse:

Motion 1: To adjourn at p.m. 7:43p.m.

All: Aye

Alexa Garvey, Chairwoman