

Region 14 Proposed 2020 - 2021 Budget Public Comments, Questions and Answers

Question:

Is the SRO budget part of the 247k in expected savings? I see that these gentlemen are working for the towns directing traffic and wanted to see if they were collecting double salary.

Response:

No. The SRO budget is not part of the expected savings of 247K. The SRO's are town employees and are on the town payroll system. If they are performing traffic services for vendors such as tree services, they are performing those duties on their own time and their time is paid for by the vendor.

Question:

Since these salaries are specifically paid by the towns will we be seeing a credit to the towns instead of using it for capital improvements?

Response:

To date, The Towns have been paid 75% of the budgeted \$220,000 annual expense. (\$110,000 for each town broken out as \$55,000 for each school.) The 75% exceeds the actual amount of school days in session. The Board and the Towns have mutually agreed that the SRO's can be assigned to perform patrol work for the Towns as they deem necessary up to 35 hours per week.

Question:

Could I get a breakout of where the 247 savings will come from?

Response:

The 247,000 saving in the 2020-2021 budget will be achieved by removing Capital Project expenditures from the proposed budget. The projects will be funded by the savings achieved by the extended school closure during the current budget.

The projects are as follows:

BES partial roof replacement 90,000
MES partial roof replacement 20,000
MES HVAC split system in Art, Music, OT/PT rooms 36,000
MES Art room ceiling replacement 6,000
WMS Culinary Room 80,000
NHS Ag-Sci 4 Circulator Pumps 15,000

Region 14 Proposed 2020 - 2021 Budget Public Comments, Questions and Answers

Question:

Please explain how the superintendent's approved salary for the year of 2019-2020 went from \$167,375 to a projected \$175,940 at the end of the 2019-2020 school year? Who approved this increase? Also, please explain the additional proposed increase for the 2020-2021 of \$180,000. This is a 7.54 percent increase over what was approved by the taxpayers in 2019 for the 2019-2020 school year.

Response:

2017/2018 Actual Salary 177,000
2018/2019 Approved Budget 177,000
2018/2019 Projected Budget 153,079
2019/2020 Approved Budget 167,375

The current Superintendent was hired and started in October 2018. At that time, the Approved Salary for the position was 177,000. The initial contract was negotiated and signed in October at an annualized salary of 162,500. In 2019/2020 The Approved Salary was budgeted at 167,375.

During the 2020/2021 Budget Prep phase that began in September 2019 the possibility was considered that a salary adjustment could possibly occur during the October annual review and a number was projected at 175,940. It is not an approved salary change. It is just a projection. One of the data points considered when projecting that number was that the highest paid Region 14 Administrative Union position is contracted at 163,783. That same position is contracted in 2020/2021 at 167,468.

Question:

Why is there a 7.54% increase in the Superintendent's salary when the fallout from the coronavirus is devastating our two communities? Is this a contractual obligation that MUST be done when small businesses are shuttered and may end up not reopening? Is it necessary to give someone a raise at this much of a percent increase now when so many people now have to collect unemployment and are in their own financial crisis? Wouldn't it be more ethical and compassionate to defer this raise to another time? CEOs do often defer taking their pay raises in times of crisis. This is indeed a crisis and should be looked at as to whether this is the proper time to implement this.

Response:

The 7.54% Increase is a not a contractual obligation. It is not an approved salary change. It is a means of providing funding should the Board find it appropriate to offer a raise following the October 2020 Superintendent's review. Nothing has been guaranteed.

Region 14 Proposed 2020 - 2021 Budget Public Comments, Questions and Answers

Question:

The Director of Curriculum & HR position on page 10 is unclear. Can you please explain the salaries for each position? Why are these positions under one line item? The apparent combined salaries in 2018-2019 was \$307,741 then, in the 2019-2020 proposed salary was dropped to \$160,597, the projected salary for 2019-2020 is higher at \$161,586 and the proposed 2020-2021 \$162,165. It also looks as if the HR position is being eliminated entirely on page 43. How can Region 14 justify eliminating an HR position that has been hard fought for and supported by the Board of Education for years? Who will perform those functions? Where is the salary for the current HR position in the current 2019-2020 budget?

Response:

The Director of Curriculum and HR Director position is a legacy line item that is used to reflect the history of that line item account. Once we are beyond needing the 2019/2019 years as reference points the line item will return to being reflective of the Director of Curriculum line item only. Both positions were a combined line item from 2016/2017 (the year the HR Director position was created) through 2018/2019. The position of HR Director was eliminated as a certified position in the 2019/2020 budget.

The 2020/2021 contracted salary can be found on Appendix A of the Administrators Contract listed on the Region 14 website. The 2020/2021 salary is stated at 162,165. The projected 2019/2020 salary line item includes a small payout of accumulated time to the former Director.

The HR Coordinator position has been eliminated in the proposed 2020/2021 budget. It fell as part of the effort to reduce expenditures. The Superintendent is active in R14 HR matters. His Administrative Assistant will handle job postings. The payroll position in the Business Office will continue to on-board new hires in the payroll system and will continue to administer employee benefits in the same manner the position as she did during the tenure of the HR Director.

Question:

Why is there a 1.0 FTE HR coordinator position being eliminated? Is this being reorganized? Is someone losing their job? Again, is this a necessary thing to do in the middle of a world crisis? There are no other positions being eliminated so why is a coordinator position being eliminated?

Response:

The HR Coordinator position has been eliminated in the proposed 2020/2021 budget. It fell as part of the effort to reduce expenditures. The work is being reorganized to function as it did prior to July 2015. The Superintendent is active in R14 HR matters. His Administrative Assistant will handle job postings. The payroll position in the Business Office will continue to on-board new hires in the payroll system and will continue to administer employee benefits in the same manner the position as she did during the tenure of the HR Director. The position is a Reduction in Force with no reassignment. If deeper budget cuts are required a further RIF may be necessary.

Region 14 Proposed 2020 - 2021 Budget Public Comments, Questions and Answers

Question:

Why is the Director of Finance's salary the same year after year? As a matter of fact, why was there a reduction in salary from 2018-2019? This doesn't make sense when it seems that others are receiving increases.

Response:

The salary for the Director of Finance remains at 115,000 consistent with his start date of July 1, 2013.

There has been reduction in salary. The 2018/2019 actual salary consists of two components. My annualized salary of 115,000 at a per diem rate of 442 upon my return from sick leave on July 23. The second component is the amount paid to the Interim Director of Finance at annualized salary of 156,000 at a per diem rate of 600.

Question:

Can you please break out the line item for auditor/consultant and define these expenditures and responsibilities? This is another area where there seems to be a proposed increase when the projection for 2019-2020 is less than what was proposed for the 2019-2020 budget and, the projected is also less than what was spent in 2018-2019. I'm unclear as to why an increase would be proposed at this time. Please explain

Response:

This line item supports two services: Audit and Actuarial. Actuarial services include two separate areas. One is for Pensions. The other is for OPEB. (Other Post-Employment Benefits). OPEB covers the cost of insurance for retirees. The 2019/2020 projection is lower than budget Due to a lot of advance prep work that our new Senior Accountant was able to provide the audit firm. She replaced a retiring 16 year Business Office employee and is an outstanding accountant. She is a CPA with years of public audit experience. Additionally, she has 5 plus years of public school Business Office experience including two as a Director of Finance. Her assistance led to fewer billable hours. The increase from the projected amount is due to the expiration of the contract with our current audit firm. We will be out to bid shortly for audit services. The exact cost impact cannot be known at this time.

Region 14 Proposed 2020 - 2021 Budget Public Comments, Questions and Answers

Question:

Can you please explain the increase in athletic coaches? A 20.28 percent increase seems quite high.

Response:

Traditionally, the high school obtained the services of an Athletic Trainer through a 3rd party agency. The service and attendance when needed has been inconsistent the last few years. Given the increased attention needed for concussion protocol in all sports it was determined that that we needed to provide consistency for the safety of our student athletes. Our Athletic Director recruited a knowledgeable, highly skilled Athletic Trainer. The funding is being moved from the contracted services account to the Coaches account with no overall budgetary impact.

Question:

Why is there a 20.28% increase in athletic coaches at the high school? What is the \$43,000 going to pay for? Is there a new team coming? Are the swim team and football co-opting? If so, would that not offset the cost of NHS coaching?

Response:

Traditionally, the high school obtained the services of an Athletic Trainer through a 3rd party agency. The service and attendance when needed has been inconsistent the last few years. Given the increased attention needed for concussion protocol in all sports it was determined that that we needed to provide consistency for the safety of our student athletes. Our Athletic Director recruited a knowledgeable, highly skilled Athletic Trainer. The funding is being moved from the contracted services account to the Coaches account with no overall budgetary impact.

Question:

Can you please explain the building improvements increase from the 2019-2020 approved budget of \$218,000 to the projected amount for 2019-2020 of \$571,500?

Response:

Given the extended school closure and the savings impact of some line items we are going to move building projects from the 2020/2021 proposed budget and complete them this fiscal year. Those projects are as follows:

The projects are as follows:

- BES partial roof replacement 90,000
- MES partial roof replacement 20,000
- MES HVAC split system in Art, Music, OT/PT rooms 36,000
- MES Art room ceiling replacement 6,000
- WMS Culinary Room 80,000
- NHS Ag-Sci 4 Circulator Pumps 15,000

Region 14 Proposed 2020 - 2021 Budget Public Comments, Questions and Answers

Question:

Can the region create a portal for the community to see each other's questions along with the region's responses? This would help with the transparency that is lacking under these difficult times. It would also help given that 8 people will ultimately be voting on a \$35 million dollar budget that will impact approximately 12,000 people in two towns.

Response:

Yes. The Questions and Comments received by 5:00 pm Friday April 10, 2020 will be posted on the Region 14 website under 2020 – 2021 Budget Comments, Questions and Answers.

Question:

Will the region and the board consider voting at a later date? Possibly in mid-May? We typically vote in May and Governor Lamont granted towns and boards with an additional 30 days to adopt their budgets. So, realistically we have until June to approve a budget.

Response:

On March 21, 2020 Governor Lamont issued Executive Order 71
The following addresses your question regarding budget adoption.

Executive Order 71 - #13 orders a *'Suspension of In-Person Budget Adoption Requirements for Municipalities'* and

Executive Order 71 - #14 orders a *'Suspension of In-Person Budget Adoption Requirements for Regional Boards of Education'*

The full text can be found on the following state of Connecticut website:

<https://portal.ct.gov/Office-of-the-Governor/Governors-Actions/Executive-Orders/Governor-Lamonts-Executive-Orders>

Comment:

These are unprecedented times when people are losing their jobs. There is clearly an increase in the need for free lunches and food bank donations in our communities. With that, I would think that it would be incumbent upon all elected officials to ensure that the public has an opportunity to weigh in on a 4.94 percent increase which, will surely be catastrophic to many members of our communities.

Region 14 Proposed 2020 - 2021 Budget Public Comments, Questions and Answers

Question:

Is the superintendent's salary increase negotiable?

Response:

Yes

Question:

The last budget was justified because of high school renovations. Shouldn't this budget be less seeing as the same renovations do not need to be completed again?

Response:

The Bond Financing of the high school project is fulling coming on line this year. The Net Annual Change in Debt Service for 2020-2021 is \$1,329,852 a 3.77% increase in the adopted 2019-2020 budget \$35,256,560.

Question:

What plans are there to utilize budget money to better prepare for a crisis like that of covid-19 where distance learning will need to be in place? It's obvious all schools/districts in the area were severely underprepared for this and with the availability of technology today that shouldn't have been the case.

Response:

In July 2015 Region 14 acquired Dell Chromebooks and established a 1:1 program providing all students with access to technology. Region 14 staff and students were well prepared to meet the Teaching and Learning requirements of Distance Learning.

Region 14 Proposed 2020 - 2021 Budget Public Comments, Questions and Answers

Question:

Will there be a vote? A town hall session? Anything at all for the taxpayers to have a say?

Response:

This forum has provided you an opportunity to question and/or comment on the proposed budget.

As to a vote:

On March 21, 2020 Governor Lamont issued Executive Order 71
The following addresses your question regarding budget vote.

Executive Order 71 - #13 orders a '*Suspension of In-Person Budget Adoption Requirements for Municipalities*' and

Executive Order 71 - #14 orders a '*Suspension of In-Person Budget Adoption Requirements for Regional Boards of Education*'

The full text can be found on the following state of Connecticut website:

<https://portal.ct.gov/Office-of-the-Governor/Governors-Actions/Executive-Orders/Governor-Lamonts-Executive-Orders>

Comment:

I do not support the budget proposal. Seriously ridiculous to have that type of increase. Cut expenses. Why are we building tennis courts, etc.? My vote is NO! Resident of Woodbury.

Region 14 Proposed 2020 - 2021 Budget Public Comments, Questions and Answers

Comment:

I wanted to verify some information regarding the budget. Does the proposed budget provide a pay increase of 7.54% for the Superintendent? If so, this is very upsetting to hear. We, as a town, as a state and as a nation are seriously stressed financially. Many of us are now only one income households where we were two income households.

We, as a town, need to work together to get through this and its aftermath once it has passed. Increasing someone's salary by 7.54% just seems fiscally irresponsible. People in our town are struggling financially and it will take some time to recuperate from this and the budget is reflecting a sizable increase for our superintendent. Really?

I understand the need to pay off the high school project and the pay for teacher's benefits and salaries. An increases such as the proposed 7.54% for the Superintendent during these times will cause us, as a family to ask ourselves, and I am sure other families as well - "do we really want to stay in Woodbury?"

I will be extremely disappointed if this budget passes with this increase.

Comment:

In a recent article in the Republican-American, Superintendent of Schools Joseph Olzacki was quoted as saying the following about the proposed 2020-2021 Region 14 budget:

"Region 14 cares that our citizens are going through a rough time. This is a caring budget."

However, the proposed budget also shows a pay increase of 7.45% for the Superintendent.

On a national level, we have seen numerous CEOs decline to accept a salary so they can pay their employees. On a local level, we've seen just about every small business struggle to stay alive. We've also seen the local food banks struggle with donations to keep a growing number of clients fed.

Based on the timing, a 7.45% increase in salary for the Superintendent of Schools does not make it a "caring budget. In my opinion, a hefty salary increase for the Superintendent is rather tone deaf during a time when the community is tightening its belt. Also, what has the Superintendent done to warrant this steep of an increase?

In the referenced article, Dr. Olzacki states that he doesn't know where else he can cut the budget. Perhaps he should start at the top.

Region 14 Proposed 2020 - 2021 Budget Public Comments, Questions and Answers

Comment:

Inquiring about the budget, specifically the pay raise to the Superintendent at a rate of 7.5%. Is this the correct rate? **Response: Yes, but negotiable.**

Upon looking on the region website for his salary and contract, both are not listed. I would like the current salary, as well as if and where in the contract this pay rate is written. A salary raise during this difficult financial time seems HIGHLY inappropriate.

Comment:

I realize now that this was due yesterday but I apologize I did not get around to it. Thank you for presenting the budget online. Although I really do wish there was some kind of slideshow or explanation for it. Just putting out these numbers is kind of hard to understand for many people. It would be great to understand why certain positions are needed to be added etc. Could those be explained more? Also can you explain the 7.45% increase for our Superintendent? I looked through the numbers and could not find anything even remotely as high. I know our superintendent works hard etc. but that's a pretty stiff increase to swallow during these times. Thank you.

Comment:

I am disappointed in the size of the increase of the new budget but after review of the numbers, I'm not sure it can be reduced! I've never voted against a school budget in my life but now in the absence of the ability to vote, I have to urge the Board to make sure they have excised every bit of fat. The presentation is poor in that it really doesn't explain what went into the numbers. I realize you've never had to do that but times have changed!!! The optics of the increase are difficult in the light of the economic hardships we are all enduring. My work hours have been cut, my 401K is now 33% less, and my property values are going down. Not sure that's a reason to cut the budget but I would appreciate the narrative that went into it. Thanks for your work and service!

Question:

Budget page 5 - Is the Early Retirement Plan an estimate of savings based on anticipated personnel taking the package and new hire replacements (Salary and benefits)?

Response:

The Savings Estimate of 150,000 is for the salary differential between 5 retirees and 5 new hires at a lower salary and step placement.

Region 14 Proposed 2020 - 2021 Budget Public Comments, Questions and Answers

Question:

Budget page 5 - Are the Grant Offsets a one-year subsidy by the state?

Response:

It is expected that the Grant Offsets for Special Education Certified staff will continue for multiple years.

Question:

Budget Page 6 - What is the source of increase in Student Transportation and Vocational Tech Transportation?

Response:

The source of the increase Student Transportation costs is the new contract that will begin July 1, 2020. It was the lowest responsible bid result from the published RFP and public bid. The Vocational Transportation is being provided by the successful low bidder as well. Based on the increased number of students attending Kaynor Tech a 2nd bus was added to start the 19/20 school year. The number of students doubled to 34 in August. One bus serves Bethlehem students. Another bus serves Woodbury students.

Question:

Budget page 26 - In WMS, we are projected to drop 9 students but we are planning on one additional new classroom teacher. What is the rationale behind this?

Response:

The additional classroom position is being added to 6th grade ELA. The current 6th grade has 5 sections and will be moving up to 7th with the current ELA teacher. Currently there are 4 sections in Grade 7. The incoming 6th grade will require 5 sections. The new position will fill out the incoming grade 6 at 5 sections.

Question:

Budget page 28 - Why is there an increase of \$15k in the Repair/Maintenance line item?

Response:

To slowly increase the repair and maintenance the line item to accurately reflect actual needs and expenditures.

Region 14 Proposed 2020 - 2021 Budget Public Comments, Questions and Answers

Question:

Does the projected number of students of 642 for NHS include both Agriscience and Regular education students?

Response:

Yes.

Question:

Budget page 44 - What is the increase in Clerical support for?

Response:

Contractual increase plus additional funding for additional workload for one position.

Question:

Revenues – Covid-19 Surplus \$352,565 would have to go to capital reserve not operating budget. We are not tracking capital improvements next year because they are getting done this year with surplus from this year.

Response:

The legislature was considering a change to allow Regional School Districts to allocate up to 2.00% surplus to capital reserve. It appears unlikely that the legislature will be back in session. The 1.00% use of excess surplus beyond the current 1.00% capital reserve allocation is being added to revenue as a means of offsetting some of the budget increase to the taxpayers.

Question:

Where are we seeing savings from the Covid-19 restrictions and what additional costs are we incurring?

Response:

Utilities and Transportation are providing savings.
Additional costs in cleaning supplies.

Region 14 Proposed 2020 - 2021 Budget Public Comments, Questions and Answers

Question:

On page 10 under Superintendent you're showing an increase of \$12,625 for a 7.54% increase. I was told the Superintendent's increase would mirror the Administrator's increase of 2.46%? Also on that page it shows Directors of Curriculum & HR. On page 43 you show the Human Resource Coordinator position being eliminated. I'm confused! What is the salary of the Curriculum Director and where is the Human Resource work going?

Response:

The Superintendent's salary is proposed for 180,000. Given that the superintendent was hired in October annual reviews by the Board are held approximately around that time each year. The proposed increase of 12,625 (7.54%) is negotiable.

The Combined Director of Curriculum and HR Director position is a legacy line item that is used to reflect the history of that line item account. Once we get past needing to show the history of the last year of the combined funding of the position it will return to just the Director of Teaching and Learning (Curriculum) salary position). The negotiated 20/21 salary for the Director of Teaching and Learning position in the Nonnewaug Administrators Group is 162,165.

The Human Resource Coordinator's position has been eliminated in this budget. The Superintendent's Administrative Assistant will be responsible for job postings. The payroll position in the Business Office will continue to on-board new hires in the payroll system and will continue to administer employee benefits in the same manner as she did during the tenure of the HR Director position.

Question:

On page 12 could you please provide a detailed list for the Auditor/Consultants line? Including names and what we are paying these individuals. If we have multi-year contracts could you please provide those details as well?

Response:

There are three firms paid under the Auditor/Consultants line item. All three firms are corporations. No individuals are paid from this line item.

The Region 14 auditor is Charles Heaven & Co. from Waterbury. Audit expense typically averages 20-35,000 per year. Their current contract expires June 30, 2020. We will be soliciting an RFP in May for sealed bids for services beginning July 1, 2020.

Pension actuarial services are provided by Hooker and Holcombe in West Hartford. They provide annual pension statement to all classified staff and provide final statements upon employee retirement. Annual cost averages 12-15,000.

www.hhconsultants.com

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Other Post-Employment Benefits (OPEB) actuarial statements for the retiree health plan as required by GASB are provided by Milliman (formerly Milliman and Robertson). They are an international firm with an office in Windsor CT. Annual cost averages 15-16,000.

www.millimanbenefits.com

Question:

On page 35 in the second table “2020-2021 projected enrollment” the total students should be 344 not 329. Which of those numbers is the correct enrollment?

Response:

329

Question:

On page 50 the Pre-School Tuition is up \$10,122 from this year’s projected. We are projecting 1 less student (BES) in the program, are we raising tuition? If so what will that look like?

Response:

The 2020 2021 budget proposal includes an additional Pre-K class specifically for 3 year olds. The additional revenue will come from typical peers required in the 3 year old class. Making this change to the existing program will provide increased, developmentally appropriate instruction for our youngest stakeholders. The changes comes with cost, but the financial budgetary increase allows R14 to best deliver services to meet the significant needs of our preschool students with disabilities.

Question:

On Pg. 38 of the original 20-21 budget under District Wide Classified Positions the Secretaries/Clerk line was 6.30 positions.

On Pg. 43 of the revised 20-21 budget under District Wide Classified Positions the Secretaries/Clerk line has been increased to 6.60 positions. Where is that additional .30 position going

Response:

The position of Mail Clerk has existed since September 2012. The position covers all 4 schools for mail and supply pick-up and delivery as well as Post Office transactions.

The position was omitted on page 38 and correctly included post edit work.

Question:

On pg. 26 of the line item budget under Purchase Services DW for \$188,079.00.

What expenses make up this line item and why is that number almost double from the 19-20 Actuals?

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Response:

The line item is to fund a 3rd party vendor to provide BCBA (Board Certified Behavioral Analyst) Services. As of 4/13/2020 the 19/20 YTD expense is 179,227.90. We are pursuing a BCBA as an R14 employee in order to get this expense to a reasonable cost. We have adjusted this line to 128,079 to reflect what a market price for this position is.

Comments, Questions and Answers Above Reviewed at the April 15, 2020 Budget Workshop.

Comments, Questions and Answers Listed Below Submitted 4/16 – 4/22/2020.

Question:

How much are we paying for the Video Consultant and where does the funding come from? Do we have a contract for these services, if so what are the terms of that contract including length of the contract please.

Response:

The Video Consultant is an at will non contracted position funded at a 20/21 proposed \$49,500 in the Purchased Services Instructional budget section under Other Purchase Services-Superintendent.

Question:

How much are we paying for JE Consulting/Joe Erardi, where does that funding come from? Do we have a contract for these services, if so what are the terms of that contract including length of the contract please? How long does the BOE plan to pay for a mentor for a Superintendent heading into his 3rd year?

Response:

Funding is under Professional Development at \$500 per month. There is no contracted term.

Region 14 Proposed 2020 - 2021 Budget Public Comments, Questions and Answers

Question:

How much are we paying for the Ruler program and where does that funding come from? Please include initial costs and any future costs including PL, along with terms of any contract between Yale/Ruler Program and Region 14.

Response:

- Mitchell and Bethlehem Elementary School were both trained in October 2019, renewal of subscription is not until October 2020
- New subscription for RULER Online platform not available until July 1, 2020 with new pricing structure
 - Cost is \$1,000 per school which includes
 - Full access to RULER Online for your entire school's faculty and staff including staff development, prek-12 curricular resources, and family engagement materials
 - Two coaching sessions for the year
 - Electronic RULER newsletters
 - Support webinars

The initial costs were \$7,500 each for BES and MES. Funding source is from Professional Development – Curriculum.

Contracts are annual with renewal date and amount as noted above.

Question:

Will town residents be able to vote on the 20-21 Region 14 Budget or has the Region 14 Board of Education chosen to strip taxpayers of their right to vote using the governor's special orders resulting from the pandemic? If so, please provide the Region's rationale.

Response:

Region 14 will comply with Executive Order 7I Issued on March 21, 2020.

I have attached a copy for your review.

7I #13 Orders a Suspension of In-Person Budget Adoption of Requirements for Municipalities.

7I #14 Orders a Suspension of In-Person Budget Adoption of Requirements for Regional school Boards of Education.

Every Municipality and Regional Board of Education will be complying the order.

Region 14 Proposed 2020 - 2021 Budget Public Comments, Questions and Answers

Question:

Thank you for your response, however, I am still unclear if residents will be able to vote on the budget since you only referenced the governor's in person voting prohibition.

Response:

Education budget will be adopted by the Region 14 Board of Education.
The Education Budget will be incorporated into the Municipal Budgets.
Municipal Budgets will be adopted by the municipal authorities in each Region 14 town.

Question:

I don't understand with these difficult economic times why we are not increasing the amount of the bond premium being applied to this years budget by at least \$675,000 to \$1,568,488 from the proposed \$893,488. This will lower the debt service increase to the taxpayer this year to \$654,852 and the remaining premium balance can be applied to future years to provide for more manageable increases of 1% or less for the following 3 years before debt service would start to decline see table below. I look forward to hearing your thoughts on the matter.

Response:

I have reviewed your proposal and the 2020/21 budget proposal for the four-year period impacted by your recommended use of the total Bond Premium in a 3 year period.

As noted in your spreadsheet. You are recommending four (4) annual budget increases in the debt service line for a four-year total annual change in debt service of \$1,415,365.

The proposed budget recommends one (1) annual budget increase followed by three (3) successive annual budget decreases for a four-year annual change in debt service of \$1,205,365.

That is a four-year total budget savings of **\$210,000** in the four year period of your recommendation.

Your Proposal:

FY	P & I	Premium	net debt service	annual change
19-20	1,137,760	-	1,137,760	
20-21	3,361,100	1,568,488	1,792,612	654,852
21-22	2,771,125	612,500	2,158,625	366,013
22-23	2,624,625	112,500	2,512,125	353,500
23-24	2,553,125	-	2,553,125	41,000
	<u>12,447,735</u>	<u>2,293,488</u>	<u>10,154,247</u>	<u>1,415,365</u>

Region 14 Proposed 2020 - 2021 Budget Public Comments, Questions and Answers

Budget Proposal:

FY	P & I	Premium	net debt service	annual change
19-20	1,137,760		1,137,760	
20-21	3,361,100	893,488	2,467,612	1,329,852
21-22	2,771,125	320,000	2,451,125	(16,487)
22-23	2,624,625	205,000	2,419,625	(31,500)
23-24	2,553,125	210,000	2,343,125	(76,500)
	<u>12,447,735</u>	<u>1,628,488</u>	<u>10,819,247</u>	<u>1,205,365</u>

Question:

Please explain why the Board of Education focused only on decreasing the proposed budget increase (the 1.17% or \$413,407); and did not explore options within the \$35 million operation budget – this is where more savings can be found (excluding Debt Service). What are the options you discussed with decreasing the existing budget?

Region 14 Proposed 2020 - 2021 Budget Public Comments, Questions and Answers

Response:

All budget additions and deletions to an Approved Budget are made to the existing budget in order to prepare a successor budget. The 2020 – 2021 Region 14 budget process is not an exception to that basic budgeting premise. All options were considered many times over during the budget process that begins in September each year. The Region 14 budget is not an incremental budget. It is a needs based budget based on the projected number and needs of students. As can be seen in the time lapse shown below the initial proposal of needs and wants gets carved into a final budget of needs. And as you know, oftentimes even some of the needs have to be whittled out in the process.

		\$ Difference	% Difference
2019-2020 Approved Budget	35,256,560		
2020-2021 Initial Proposal	39,311,713	4,055,153	11.50%
2020-2021 Adjustments 2/1/2020	38,042,654	(1,269,059)	-3.60%
2020-2021 Adjustments 2/28/2020	37,852,357	(190,297)	-0.54%
2020-2021 Adjustments 3/30/2020	36,999,820	(852,537)	-2.42%
2020-2021 Adjustments 4/23/2020	36,879,945	(119,875)	-0.34%
	Totals	1,623,385	4.60%

Region 14 Proposed 2020 - 2021 Budget Public Comments, Questions and Answers

Comment:

During these times when citizens are struggling to make ends-meet, is not a time to spend on business as usual. We are all making compromises and expect this level of accountability from our Board of Education, and all leaders of Region 14. We ask you to be courageous leaders on behalf of our citizens.

Question:

(a) Please explain how you can justify your decision to move forward with salary increases when so many others in our towns will receive NO salary increase this year?

Response:

They are part of contracted obligations.

Question:

(b) What are your barriers to implementing NO salary increases, and what steps have you taken to investigate the feasibility of staff givebacks or allowances through a Memorandum of Understanding?

Response:

Response pending.

Question:

(c) The Town of Bethlehem was able to work with the Union and Union employees and agreed to a freeze for 20/21 budget year. Has there been an attempt to work with the different unions within Region 14 for the same freeze request?

Response:

Yes

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Question:

Please confirm how much is the current Surplus? During these unprecedented times, what unprecedented measures have been considered with the current Surplus, especially related to:

- ☐ Returning Surplus back to the taxpayers?
- ☐ Using Surplus as revenue for next year's budget
- ☐ Reallocating to cover other expense?
- ☐ Investigating alternative means of using this years' funds to offset next year 's operating budget through pre-purchasing or pre-payment of obligations (i.e., pension, materials, contracted services)?

Response:

It is impossible to confirm a final surplus at this point. Currently we estimate the 2020-2021 net surplus at approximately \$401,000.

I view bullet points 1 & 2 as the same issue and bullet points 3 &4 as the same issue.

As to Bullet points 1&2:

Please refer to Proposed Budget page 50 – Revenues by Source. There is a proposed line item revenue of \$352,565. Source of funds is from the FY19-20 Expected Surplus due to Covid-19. The stated amount represents one-percent of the 2019 2020 Approved budget. That is the amount allowed by state statute normally transferred to a Capital Reserve Account at year end. Instead of building up Region 14 Capital Reserves this proposal meets both bullet points 1 and 2: It returns surplus back to the taxpayers by using surplus as revenue for next year's budget.

As to Bullet points 3&4:

\$247,000 was reduced from the 20/21 proposal of capital projects. Projects to be completed this fiscal year are as follows:

- BES partial roof replacement 90,000
- MES partial roof replacement 20,000
- MES HVAC split system in Art, Music, OT/PT rooms 36,000
- MES Art room ceiling replacement 6,000
- WMS Culinary Room 80,000
- NHS Ag-Sci 4 Circulator Pumps 15,000

The proposal meets both bullet points 3 and 4: It reallocates current funds to cover expenses that were initially projected as 20/21 expenses and it is an alternative means of using this year's funds to offset next year's operation budget.

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Question:

The Bethlehem Board of Selectman voted to defer tax payments for all taxpayers until October 1, 2020.

Will the Board of Education allow for the Town of Bethlehem and the Town of Woodbury to modify its payment schedule to Region 14 as shown below?

- 7/1/20 5%
- 8/1/20 5%
- 9/1/20 5%
- 10/1/20 5%
- 11/1/20 -6/1/21, 10% each month

Response:

The Board is always willing to work out payment schedule modifications to meet its cash flow obligations. The projected cash flow needs for the period 7/1/20-10/30/20 is \$11,375,567. Review the deferral impact and let me know if the fact that escrowed taxes will be paid in July has an impact on the 4 four month 5.00% payment request. If not, The Region will need to borrow payment anticipation notes in the market. Thus increasing the budget to cover additional interest expense.

Comment:

Thank you for all that you do. During these uncertain times, I hope that you and your loved ones are safe and enjoying more family time.

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Question:

I had the opportunity to listen in on Wednesday night's BOE 1st budget workshop and, completely, agree that any new requests should be musts versus wants in these uncertain economic times.

From the discussion, I would agree that addressing the mold issue in the culinary arts room and guidance counseling rooms is a must as it is a safety issue.

I would, also, argue that the middle school ELA position is a must due to class size issues, documented weakness in testing scores and the quality of work I have seen from my own children (entering 8th and 6th graders). As my children are overall strong students, but with weaknesses in reading and writing, they do not receive special services meaning they rely upon the availability of their ELA teacher to address their needs during class time. I am concerned with larger class size that individualized learning will be compromised. I already feel that writing and grammar are not given the attention which they are due during class time.

So that I may better understand the role and placement of this proposed WMS position, could one of you please tell me more?

Response:

The position you are inquiring about in the proposed budget is for a seventh-grade teacher. The current sixth grade requires a staff of five content area teachers to keep class size at an average of 22 students (without a 5th teacher, classes will be over 28). By doing this, we can better address learning throughout the school. For example, adding this teacher not only will keep class size at an appropriate level but will also allow us to restore a position that was removed a few years back. We previously had a writing class as well as a reading class. This teacher will support our students in ELA in 6th and 7th grade, by specifically teaching the additional reading or writing class. Students in elementary school receive 2.5 hours of ELA instruction/day. Students entering 6th grade currently receive only 50 minutes. The addition of this teacher will double our ELA time to what we had before.

Another benefit is that it allows the all students to have the same school-wide schedule, resulting in more time for intervention at each grade level to help our struggling learners. By adding this position, we are addressing several issue that will directly improve academic performance in the areas of reading and writing, and allow for more math and ELA intervention.

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Comment:

To whom it may concern,

I am emailing to show my support for keeping the proposed WMS reading/writing position which will double ELA instruction time for 6th and 7th graders from 50 minutes to 100 minutes in the budget for the coming year.

Thank you for your consideration!

Comment:

Thank you for considering my perspective for adding the English Language Arts position to Woodbury Middle School for the 2020 – 2021 school year!

- I believe that the ELA teaching position is an essential part of student learning.
- Woodbury Middle School students will benefit greatly by adding this requirement to their regimen.
- Reading (Literature) and Writing are integrated subjects and are involved in all other subjects.
- Special time and effort are needed in ELA to help students gain skill in these areas.
- It will assist in preparing students for future school work.
- It will help them to gain confidence in their ability, enhance their written expression and ensure successful outcomes in school and after graduation.

It has been brought to my attention that ELA, Reading (Literature) and Writing, is treated as separate curriculum at the elementary school level in Region 14. However, ELA is not designated as separate curriculum at the Middle School level, where it remains, equally important.

- The higher class size that will occur if this position is not added may cause teacher feedback to students, a necessary component of learning how to revise and improve their work, being of primary concern, to fall short.
- I have noticed that more attention to spelling, grammar, sentence structure and written expression, needs to be addressed to build competence.
- Lower test scores show evidence of needing the ELA position at Woodbury Middle School.
- The intended Readers and Writers Workshop Model requires an experienced and knowledgeable teacher.

It is my firm belief that the English Language Arts teaching position at Woodbury Middle School, is a must, not a want!

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Comment:

First and foremost, we would like to commend R14's administration, Board of Education, and Director of Finance and Operations, Wayne McAllister, for year after year, finding a way to honor tax payer dollars by maintaining low operating cost increases (averaging an annual 1.15% increase over the past 7 years).

During these unprecedented times, we agree with R14's Board of Education that next year's budget should reflect the region's "needs" versus "wants". We believe, we can all concur, that the instruction of reading and writing, safety issues, and job preservation are among the highest of needs. To that extent, we respectfully ask the BOE, in regards to the superintendent's proposed 2020-2021 budget:

1. To preserve the addition of WMS Reading and Writing instructional position
 - a) 40% of R14 students are below grade level, district wide, in reading and writing, in sharp contrast with neighboring school districts.

Based on standardized testing scores from Smarter Balance between 2014 – 2019, nearly 40% of R14 students are below grade level in reading and writing and falling, significantly, behind of their peers in the neighboring school districts of R12 and R15. (See CT Mirror 9/9/19 or Patch 9/12/19 article)

- b) Return ILA instruction, at the middle school level, to the way it used to be taught before test scores plummeted.

This position will double the amount of Integrated Language Arts (ILA) instruction time for 6th and 7th graders, starting in the fall, by reinstating an instructional position which allows reading and writing to be taught as two separate classes. This is the way ILA used to be taught at WMS. Currently, WMS students receive only 50 minutes of ILA instruction. This would double and bring it more to par with the 2.5 hours of ILA instruction students, currently, receive at the elementary level. Test scores, clearly, demonstrate the need.

- c) Without this position, class size and differentiated learning will be compromised.

26% of WMS students (82 of 314) have an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) or a 504 plan. Add on top of that a projected large class size of over 28 in 7th and 25 in 6th, feedback or individualized learning becomes much more challenging. According to Robert Marzano, a leading educational researcher, without substantive teacher feedback on how to revise and improve work, student learning is limited.

- d) Low test scores mean lower property values.

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2. To preserve the removal of likely mold from WMS' culinary arts room
 - a) Clearly, this is a health and safety issue and must be addressed.

3. To reinstate the Human Resources Coordinator position
 - a) R14's history of high turnover within the administration, student support services, and instructional staff, clearly, demonstrates why it is important to have a dedicated and knowledgeable person at the helm.
 - b) This is a clerical versus administrative position giving significant savings to tax payers already.
 - c) Compliance issues are likely to be overlooked, without this position, and could lead to higher legal costs.
 - d) R14 would be an outlier among neighboring school districts for not having this clerical position.
 - e) Preservation of staff is the right thing to do during these uncertain economic times.
 - f) Could savings be possibly found in the \$91,276 allotted for special education tuition or somewhere else?

In conclusion, these are trying times. A balanced approach, keeping tax payer costs down and maintaining a quality educational system, is needed. As the BOE alone will vote and pass into law next year's budget, it is especially important that voter input be considered. We hope this letter helps inform the conversation and your decision.

Comment:

My husband and I are parents of two Region 14 students, and registered voters with the Town of Woodbury.

We are writing to express our concern with the potential of 28 kids in a class for our 6th and 7th grade students this coming year should the proposed WMS reading/writing position be cut from the budget.

Thank you for your consideration in this.

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Comment:

At a time of crisis and uncertainty, we feel it is most important to preserve personnel, and those who serve Region 14, and not add to the unemployment and hardship which surround us these days. We pride ourselves on living in a district that treats its members and employees as a family and as such, we can do better to care for our own.

The elimination of this clerical position may create inefficiencies in the system, which may be exacerbated when the schools reopen and individuals must be hired. This HR position is more than just posting jobs on a job board or giving new hire packets out. It is also making sure that teachers are qualified and certified to teach what they are teaching and to accurately report to the State Department of Education.

We feel it is of utmost importance to preserve this position at this time and hope you will consider our request positively.