

REGIONAL SCHOOL DISTRICT NO. 17
BOARD OF EDUCATION
SPECIAL MEETING
ANNUAL HEARING
April 7, 2015

A meeting of the Regional School District No. 17 Board of Education was held on April 7, 2015 in the Student Commons of Haddam-Killingworth Middle School. Board of Education Chair, Sue Twachtman, called the meeting to order at 7:04 PM.

Members Present: *Kathy Brown, Becky Valenti, Amy Jacques-Purdy, Dan Chase, Jeannie Young, Karen Perry, Susan Dean, Michele Amendola, Joel D'Angelo and Sue Twachtman*

Members Absent: *Brian Gamache*

Also Present: *Superintendent of Schools, Howard Thiery, Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction, Dr. Holly Hageman, and Director of Fiscal Operations, Martha Vaughn, and Board Clerk Larissa Johnson*

Visitors: *Approx. 26*

Call to Order/Opening of Meeting

Board of Education Chair, Sue Twachtman called the meeting to order at 7:04 PM. The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

Presentation of proposed 2015-2016 Board of Education Budget

Board Treasurer Joel D'Angelo presented the 2015-2016 Board of Education Budget.

Community Input regarding proposed 2015-2016 Board of Education Budget

The following members of the community addressed the Board;

Joann Nesti of Higganum asked whether the Net Budget is the same as the assessment to the town. Superintendent Thiery responded that no, it does not include the fund balance at the end of the year and it gets broken out per town.

Ted Grambala of Higganum asked why the town of Haddam pays more than Killingworth and asked why the per-pupil expenditure exceeds that of local catholic high school tuition. He also asked whether bus transportation could be eliminated because he has observed many parents waiting for the bus with their children in their cars and suggested that they drive their kids to school instead. He also asked about teachers' pensions and insurance and said that we shouldn't spend as much money as we do on schools because money doesn't always mean a great education.

Peter Renwick of Higganum said that a 3.61% increase is unsustainable. He said that the Board needs to go back to the drawing board. Sharing advice he once learned, he said that a lot of the figures

given were presented as non-discretionary, however a professor at the business school he attended said that no cost is fixed in the long run. He said that we cannot afford to go year in and year out on this trend of an increasing budget. He requested that the Board go back to the drawing board and look more closely for cuts of the budget and stop the long-term trend of increasing the budget.

Sabrina Houlton of Higganum said that as someone who works at a Fortune 50 company, she understands that the school district is not a business. She said that she understands that the district is subject to an enormous number of regulations under state and federal laws, including special education regulations and that the district even has restrictions against cutting the budget. She said that she supports this budget and would even support putting some items back in. She said their primary job is providing a quality education for students and not to short-change them. She said that it is penny-wise and pound-foolish to short-change children.

Erica Fleig of Higganum said that she felt that the sentiment in the room is that the Board took the easy way out. She said that she understands that making these budget cuts have been painful for a lot of people and that the Board has not taken the easy way out. She said that there is a recognition in the community supporting a lot of thoughtful work has gone into putting together this budget and the decisions that were made this year. She suggested that perhaps the Board could look at some of the Special Education programs being put into place such as the BCBA program an 18-21 program as a possible source of revenue by having students attend from other districts. She suggested the Board look towards taking in revenue in certain areas and avoid cutting costs.

Jen Maxwell of Haddam said that she vote in support of the budget. She said that teachers aren't respected in this country as they are in some other countries. She said that people talk about the insurance and retirement benefits for teachers, however she says that she pays a higher premium, even if her deductible is lower. She said that her child was in a Kindergarten class of 21 and a 1st grade class of 22 and that she would love to see smaller class sizes.

Superintendent Thiery responded to comments and clarified that teachers' retirement is not funded by the budget nor contributed to by the school district. He said that teachers are part of a state retirement system, rather than the social security system, and that it is separate from the local school district budget.

Arthur Collins of Higganum addressed the Board. He said that he moved to town for the quality of the education that the District offers. He said that he has three daughters who attended HK and then graduated from universities, and one daughter is getting her master's degree. He said that we have to pay fair wages to employees of the district and we have to pay taxes. He asked about the reduction to the unemployment line and Superintendent Thiery responded that they looked at the anticipated liability more closely and were able to fund the unemployment line at more a practical level of liability, rather than a maximum anticipated level. Mr. Collins also remarked that teachers have to continue their education and work from home in order to accomplish all of their responsibilities. He also asked about deferring maintenance to facilities, and Superintendent Thiery responded by giving an example that typically, each year, the district sweeps and re-stripes parking lots in the district. He said that this year, we will sweep the parking lots but will not re-stripe them as it does not need to be done every year. He also said that curb maintenance and repair will be selectively deferred. Mr. Collins also asked about the Bus Transportation RFP and Superintendent Thiery responded that the Board is still in the stage of analyzing the responses from the five companies who submitted proposals. Mr. Collins concluded by saying that he firmly believes in providing a good education and that he will always come out to support the education budget.

Alina Grambala of Higganum also addressed the Board and said that she comes from a family of teachers and said that she does appreciate teachers' work and she said that enrollment is going down but expenses are going up and she said that we have to look at the budget at almost a household level. She also

asked about the class sizes being projected at an average of 15-16 per class. Superintendent Thiery responded that class sizes at the elementary school level are projected at 16.5, and at the middle school at 21 for the core classes such as English and Math, and at an average of 20 per class in the core subject areas. Mrs. Grambala also suggested that the Board look at asking parents to pay for some extra-curricular activities to help keep the cost per pupil down.

Sabrina Houlton of Higganum spoke again responding to comment regarding having parents pay for extra-curricular activities. She said that if an extra fee for extra-curricular activities is imposed, some students who cannot afford to participate will not be able to, just as students who depend upon the late bus to get home from after-school activities, may not be able to participate next year due to the late bus being cut. She said that she strongly supports not having students pay directly for extra-curricular activities so that all students can participate.

Board Chair Sue Twachtman thanked everyone for coming and encouraged members of the community to contact Superintendent Thiery or the Board of Education if they have additional questions regarding the budget.

Adjournment

Board Chair Sue Twachtman called for the meeting to adjourn at 8:00 PM.

Respectfully submitted,



Larissa B. Johnson
Board Clerk

Approval: Becky Valenti Date: May 9 2019
Becky Valenti, Secretary