

REGIONAL SCHOOL DISTRICT NO. 7

Newbury Library Media Center

Board of Education Meeting – Budget Workshop

March 5, 2025 – 6:00 p.m.

APPROVED 3.12.25

PRESENT: Chair Ms. Molly Sexton Read (B), Vice-Chair Mr. Robert Jerram (NH), Secretary / Treasurer Mr. Noel Gauthier (NH), Ms. Deborah Bell (N), Ms. Kim Crone (N), Ms. Terri Kenneson (C), Ms. Lisa Fragale (C), Ms. Mary Duran (B), Superintendent Steven K. LePage, Director of Finance & Operations Mr. James Gaskins,. Barkhamsted First Selectman Mr. Nicholas Lukiwsky, Barkhamsted Board of Finance Chairperson Mr. Richard Winn, New Hartford First Selectman Mr. Daniel Jerram, New Hartford Board of Finance Chairperson Ms. Kerry Guilfoyle, Colebrook First Selectman Mr. Brad Bremer, Colebrook Board of Finance Chairperson Mr. Duncan Wilber, Norfolk First Selectman Mr. Matthew Riiska, Norfolk Board of Finance Chairperson Mr. Michael Sconyers.

Absent: HS Principal Gary Franklin, MS Principal Ryan Cornelius, and Student Representatives Amaya Washington and Owen Langer.

CALL TO ORDER: Ms. Sexton Read called the Regular Board of Education meeting to order at 6:04 p.m.

PUBLIC PORTION: None.

SUPERINTENDENT REPORT

Superintendent LePage completed a presentation for the Board of Education and First Selectmen on the Proposed Budget for 2025-2026. He discussed which areas of the budget had decreases, as well as areas of unavoidable increases. Breakdowns of student enrollment per town was shown in chart form to show a decreasing pattern for Norfolk and Barkhamsted while New Hartford and Colebrook showed either increase in enrollment or consistent enrollment. Discussion followed the enrollment charts as the number of students does affect the amount of money the towns are responsible for. After his presentation, he opened the floor to the Selectmen, Board members, and guests for any further discussion or questions.

DIRECTOR OF FINANCE AND OPERATIONS

Mr. Gaskins did not have a presentation, but contributed to conversation in regards to areas where cuts have already been made and potential options to better utilize the budget money.

OLD BUSINESS

None.

NEW BUSINESS

None.

CORRESPONDENCE

None.

OPPORTUNITY FOR PUBLIC TO SPEAK ON AGENDA ITEMS

First Selectman Jerram thanked everyone at the meeting and explained that his area of concern was the staffing situation and the decline of the student population. First Selectman Jerram stated that over the 10 years, the student enrollment has decreased significantly from 1100 students, yet the staffing population has had a minimal decrease; noting that the price per pupil 10 years ago was approximately \$16,000-\$17,000. While today's price per pupil is \$30,600.00, noting that it is a 70% increase and averaging increase of 7%. He followed this statement by stating the chart for COLA and Social Security are not true because the checks being written are on an average rate of 7%. Superintendent LePage interjected that the current state of inflation and COVID were factored into this budget as we are not in the same financial and economic situation 10 years ago. First Selectman Jerram acknowledged this and stated how we are down 30% percent down in students but have the same amount of employees and feels that the budget has been "massaged". He then asked if there were areas of non-teaching staff the could be consolidated (i.e. counselors) as caseloads have decreased with the noticeable decrease in student body. Superintendent LePage communicated that he appreciated Mr. Jerram asking this question, and explained that he feels the counselors are needed now more than ever with the uptick in mental health needs and special education requirements. Ms. Sexton Read joined the discussion and voiced how with the increase in student needs we do need the bodies in the building to give the students the best support. Whether it is students with IEPs, struggling with specific subjects, or needing assistance with FAFSA and other college related material. Mr. Jerram began comparing our budget to school districts such as Thomaston and East Granby. Superintendent LePage presented a chart with the surrounding districts budgets showing how Thomaston's budget is proposed higher than our districts, and it is difficult to compare with East Granby as they are a K-12 and categorized differently. Ms. Sexton Read thanked First Selectman Jerram for the well-articulated challenge and the Board will be looking into the concerns he proposed. She stated that the Board will be creative in finding solutions that will not sacrifice the experience the students have at the school. She did acknowledge that we do have less students today.

Norfolk Board of Finance Chair Michael Sconyers stated that the numbers for Norfolk are interesting and he has had townspeople question the assessment and percentage they have to contribute with such a small amount of student population. He explained to the board how they have consolidated some classes, stating that their class population has decreased from 190 students to approximately 61-67 today.

Kerry Guilfoyle, the Board of Finance Chairperson from New Hartford, asked on the status of the New Hartford transportation contracts. Mr. Gaskins stated they are currently still out to bid, but that the other three contracts have been settled. Dattco being the current company in question. There has been a 5% increase budgeted for transportation as we have seen steady increase in their fees. The bid has been modified from a 10 bus request to 9 buses for the year.

ADJOURNMENT

MOTION by Mr. Jerram, seconded by Mr. Gauthier, to **ADJOURN** at 7:48 p.m. **AYE:** Ms. Sexton Read, Mr. Jerram, Ms. Kenneson, Ms. Bell, Ms. Crone, Mr. Gauthier, Ms. Fragale, Ms. Duran. **NAY:** None. **ABSTAIN:** None. **MOTION PASSED.**

The next BOE Meeting is scheduled for March 12th 2025.

Respectfully submitted,

Emily Vacila
Board Clerk