REGIONAL SCHOOL DISTRICT NO. 7

Colebrook Town Hall
Budget Proposal Meeting
March 19, 2025 – 6:00 p.m.
APPROVED 3.26.25

PRESENT: Chair Ms. Molly Sexton Read (B), Vice-Chair Mr. Robert Jerram (NH), Ms. Deborah Bell (N), Ms. Terri Kenneson (C), Ms. Lisa Fragale (C), Superintendent Steven K. LePage, Director of Finance & Operations Mr. James Gaskins, Secretary / Treasurer Mr. Noel Gauthier (NH), First Selectman of Colebrook, Mr. Brad Bremer

Absent: HS Principal Gary Franklin, MS Principal Ryan Cornelius, and Student Representatives Amaya Washington and Owen Langer, Ms. Mary Duran (B).

CALL TO ORDER: Ms. Sexton Read called the Proposed Budget Meeting to order at 6:00 p.m.

BUDGET PRESENTATION

Ms. Sexton Read began the meeting by greeting everyone and thanking them for being present. She then began the presentation by giving a brief introduction of where the budget proposal currently stands. Since the recent adjustments have been made the current 2025-2026 proposed budget is at a 2.29% increase with a 3.31% assessment. This is currently trending to be below a 2.5% yearly increase. She then explained that there were unavoidable increases such as staff medical benefits which increased by 12%, special education continues to be a budget driver, and utilities. She then followed her statement by giving a few potential budget saving solutions such as hiring qualified but lower tiered teaching staff as current higher tiered staff retire or relocate, several capital projects were deferred, and how the transportation contracts were recently negotiated and the district will see a savings. She emphasized how they were creative with where decreases were made without affecting the experience of the students or what classes the district has to offer them. The conversation transitioned when Ms. Sexton Read showed slides of what types of classes Northwestern Regional No.7 is able to offer. This list included special sciences, multiple Vo-Ag programs, and Uconn credit classes. She then presented the budget slides broken down by categories of areas of spending, explaining which areas had the increases as well as the areas that had significant savings. She then gave an overview of the current ongoing Vo-Ag Roof Project and where the current funds come from and how the state and grant will be paying majority percentage. She then broke down the revenues and assessments for everyone present, and explained how the student enrollment affects these numbers. The following slide showed a breakdown of student enrollment and showed the following numbers: Barkhamsted -16 students, Colebrook +1 student, New Hartford +5 students, and Norfolk -10 students. Although we have seen increases in certain areas, the district's budget is currently showing as the fourth lowest proposed budget in the state. Ms. Sexton Read then ended the presentation by opening the floor to the public for any questions, comments, or concerns.

OPPORTUNITY FOR PUBLIC TO SPEAK

A Colebrook resident stated that the 40% of Middle School students needing additional support is alarming. She then questioned, why is this happening and are they coming from the elementary schools that unprepared?

Ms. Sexton Read responded that the 40% includes both Math and Science, a percentage are struggling with one subject or the other; while others need assistance with both subjects. While some issues may be from the elementary schools, another contributing factor could be how the pandemic negatively impacted schools temporarily and how it created learning changes amongst the younger student body. Colebrook School Superintendent Robert Gilbert contributed to the conversation by thanking Ms. Sexton Read for her presentation and voiced that during the pandemic, Colebrook Elementary hired an additional math tutor to help support its students while everyone adjusted to the world changes.

BOF Chair Duncan Wilbur asked about the cost for the Warner Theatre for graduation vs. being able to utilize the High School's gym and or auditorium.
Ms. Sexton Read replied stating that she did not have the cost amount in front of her but she would have Mr. Gaskins from the finance department send him over a copy of the cost breakdown. She did confirm there is a fee to rent the Theatre, as well as a rental fee for the risers the students sit on. Our district "piggy backs" with other schools to lessen the rental costs. She then explained that the reason we utilize the Warner Theatre for graduation is for the benefits of more seating and space for

guests, better handicap access, and the Town of Torrington shuts the road down to allow space for families to gather and congratulate their graduating senior.

First Selectman, Mr. Brad Bremer then recognized and thanked the Board of Education members that represent Colebrook for their years of service, Ms. Terri Kenneson with 20 years and Ms. Lisa Fragale with 8 years. Their time and years of volunteering for the board is greatly appreciated.

ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was then called to an end at 6:38 pm.

The next BOE Meeting is scheduled for March 26, 2025 in Norfolk.

Respectfully submitted,

Emily Vacila
Board Clerk