REGIONAL SCHOOL DISTRICT NO. 7

New Hartford Town Hall
New Hartford Budget Hearing
April 1, 2025 – 7:00 p.m.
APPROVED 4.9.25

PRESENT: Chair Ms. Molly Sexton Read (B), Vice-Chair Mr. Robert Jerram (NH), Ms. Deborah Bell (N), Ms. Kim Crone(N), Superintendent Steven K. LePage, Secretary / Treasurer Mr. Noel Gauthier (NH).

Absent: HS Principal Gary Franklin, MS Principal Ryan Cornelius, and Student Representatives Amaya Washington and Owen Langer, Ms. Lisa Fragale (C), Ms. Terri Kenneson (C), Ms. Mimi Duran (B), Director of Finance & Operations Mr. James Gaskins.

CALL TO ORDER: Ms. Kerri Guilfoyle called the Budget Hearing to order at 7:02 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 resulting in a savings to the district. She emphasized that 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 the 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. The district's budget is currently 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 New Hartford resident explained that she believes the learning loss following the pandemic is the source of the challenges being faced by students. She suggested that the district can think about reducing the certified staff through retirement before positions and or programs are cut from the budget. She then stated that the programs NWR7 offers are phenomenal and she would be extremely disappointed if any losses of those programs would occur. She highly suggests keeping all mental health aid available to students as there have been major changes in the mental health of children. She also thanked the board for all that they do for the school.
Ms. Molly Sexton Read responded saying she does understand the learning loss from the pandemic and recognize that we do have students that are not meeting where we want them to be academically. She clarified that the Board is not passing blame to elementary teachers. She does believe that the staff will continue to do their best to intervene and provide the needed support the students may need.

Another New Hartford resident asked why the school is not receiving their full 88% reimbursement and is someone in the finance department following up on as to why.
Superintendent LePage responded by explaining that the state unfortunately underfunded the account, but he continues to advocate for increasing the funding.

A New Hartford resident asked if the school was utilizing outside sources to help students with mental health issues outside of school and noted that these sources may help to mitigate costs for the school.
Ms. Sexton Read as well as a resident confirmed that those outside sources are utilized but do have some longer wait times to be seen depending on which resource the student may need.

A New Hartford resident noted that because New Hartford has the largest population she wondered if there was any additional ways the Board could engage residents in the preparation of the budget.
Ms. Sexton Read explained the full process of building the budget and explained that the collaboration was why she is presenting to the public today. She then explained that once the budgets go to referendum the public has the opportunity to vote yes or no to the budget. She also encouraged the public to attend the weekly meetings and to voice their inputs.

A New Hartford resident questioned the change in scores from PSATs in 2024 to the results of the SATs in 2025. He asked to see the growth of the cohort's scores again.
Ms. Sexton Read presented the slide showing the cohorts growth from PSATs and SATs showing the growth and higher scores from the 2025 class.

First Selectman, Mr. Dan Jerram, asked the Board what the cost expectations for re-roofing the school building aside from the Vo-Ag roof would be, and how many years would it take before it is included in the budget proposals.
Ms. Sexton Read replied that it is on the horizon but they are targeting for it to be in approximately 2-3 years.

ADJOURNMENT

The NWR 7 portion of the hearing ended at 7:48 p.m.

The next BOE Meeting is scheduled for April 8, 2025 in Barkhamsted.

Respectfully submitted,

Emily Vacila
Board Clerk