REGIONAL SCHOOL DISTRICT NO. 7

Barkhamsted Elementary School
Budget Proposal Meeting
April 8, 2025 – 7:00 p.m.
APPROVED 4.21.25

PRESENT: Chair Ms. Molly Sexton Read (B), Ms. Deborah Bell (N), Ms. Mary Duran (B), Superintendent Steven K. LePage, Director of Finance & Operations Mr. James Gaskins, First Selectman of Barkhamsted, Mr. Nick Lukiwsky.

Absent: HS Principal Gary Franklin, MS Principal Ryan Cornelius, and Student Representatives Amaya Washington and Owen Langer, Ms. Lisa Fragale (C), Secretary / Treasurer Mr. Noel Gauthier (NH), Vice-Chair Mr. Robert Jerram (NH), Ms. Terri Kenneson (C), Ms. Kim Crone (N)

CALL TO ORDER: The Proposed Budget Meeting was called to order at 7:00 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 Barkhamsted resident asked the Board about the percentage of Middle School students needing additional help and what the district is doing to help.

Ms. Sexton Read responded by explaining that current Middle School Principal, Ryan Cornelius and previous principal Fran Amara have worked extremely hard to provide the best support to the students that may need it. She then went further into detail about how the district is not blaming the elementary schools but believes the learning gap is an unfortunate after-effect from the Covid lockdown.

A Barkhamsted resident asked if the homeschooled kids were accounted for when determining budgets and if there is any information on how many students leave the district to become homeschooled.

Superintendent LePage answered by explaining he did not have that data with him but he would look into it and forward it to the resident.

A Barkhamsted resident asked the Board for clarification on the budget variance and if special education was included.

Ms. Sexton Read explained to the resident the process on how they achieve the numbers they presented and how it did include special education as it is one of the budget drivers.
Superintendent LePage then added to the conversation and explained that the district is only receiving a partial percentage of the money back due to the state underfunding the Excess Cost Account.

A Barkhamsted resident then followed this conversation by asking if the special education programs were at risk due to the decreased percentage of money back and what were to happen if the district was to only receive approximately 50% back instead of the estimated 69%.

Ms. Sexton Read explained that the district would be responsible for finding additional areas within the budget to cut more money and allocate the funds to the best of their abilities without affecting the students experience. There is also potential to do a spending freeze.

A Barkhamsted resident asked if anyone ever gets a 100% refund back from the Excess Cost and if Legislators see the numbers that the districts are receiving back.

Ms. Sexton Read and Superintendent LePage explained that they have provided letters to legislature and that it is hurting districts but emphasized that no one in the state is receiving a full percentage back from the Excess Cost Account.

A Barkhamsted resident questioned what capital projects and or objects were being affected with the $50k cut to that budget category.

Ms. Sexton Read responded by explaining there was not a specific project that was being deferred at this time but the administration felt comfortable cutting this category due to the fact that with the larger projects like the roofing project they're intending to do in the near future, the board can bond the projects.
Superintendent LePage joined the conversation by explaining that the district can also apply for grants and there are other options to borrow and or bond to help lessen the upfront costs of projects.

ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was then called to an end at 7:41 pm.

The next BOE Meeting is scheduled for April 21st, 2025.

Respectfully submitted,

Emily Vacila
Board Clerk