District Budget Meeting
May 5, 2025

Board Present: Jason Kemp, Chair; Anna James, Vice Chair; Martha Shoemaker, Secretary; Christopher Staab, Treasurer; Scott Brown; Laura Dean-Frazier; Susan Fogliano; Gavin Lodge; Alexander Lowry

Administration Present: Ian Neviaser, Superintendent of Schools; Holly McCalla, Business Manager

Others Present: Lynn Warren, Moderator; 7 community members

The meeting was called to order at 6:30 p.m. by Chairman Jason Kemp. The Pledge of Allegiance was recited. Martha Shoemaker read the call of the meeting.

Notice is hereby given of the Annual Budget Meeting and Vote for the Regional School District No. 18 to be held at Regional School District No. 18, Board of Education Conference Room at Center School, 49 Lyme Street, Old Lyme, Connecticut at 6:30 p.m. on Monday, May 5, 2025 to act upon the following:

1. To adopt a budget of $39,650,803 for the fiscal year beginning July 1, 2025 through June 30, 2026 as recommended by the Regional School Board.
2. To conduct such other business as may properly come before the meeting.

By vote of the Regional School District No. 18 Board of Education, the vote on item number 1 shall be by voting tabulators in the Towns of Lyme and Old Lyme on May 6, 2025 between the hours of 12:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m. pursuant to Section 7-7 of the Connecticut General Statutes.

Voting will take place at the following locations: in the Town of Lyme, at the Town Hall, 480 Hamburg Road, Lyme, Connecticut and in the Town of Old Lyme, at the Lyme-Old Lyme Middle School, 53 Lyme Street, Old Lyme, Connecticut.

Mrs. James made a motion, which was seconded by Mrs. Fogliano, to nominate Lynn Warren as the moderator of the meeting. There were no further nominations. The vote on the motion was unanimously in favor.

Lynn Warren explained the qualifications for voting at the referendum and the specifics relative to voting in each town. The meeting was opened up for comments and questions.

Andy Russell, a resident of Old Lyme for 32 years, stated that he was not looking for the Board of Ed to reduce the budget but rather recommended they take $700,000 out of the undesignated fund, which currently is at $3.1 million, to offset the increase in special ed in this year's budget. He suggested this be done each year for the next four or five years until the debt service starts dropping off.

Randy Nixon, a resident of Old Lyme for 43 years, seconded the proposal by Andy Russell but recommended that the amount be raised to $800,000 so that it would be commensurate with what the Board of Finance did to try to offset some of the increases affecting the taxpayers.

David Kelsey, an Old Lyme resident, voiced concern that they have a $57 million building project based on higher enrollment figures than what is being experienced. He noted that the high school will eventually have to be renovated, and they should not be relying on projections that are not commensurate with reality. He also asked that the Board revisit the minimum budget requirement as they are at a 10:1 student/teacher ratio (plus paraprofessionals) and should be very careful or they will end up spending an excessive amount of money on their schools and not utilizing them near capacity.

Maria Marchant, an Old Lyme resident, made the comment that the Board has a fiduciary responsibility to the taxpayers to ensure they are making smart choices.

Mona Caldwell, an Old Lyme resident, stated that the budget has increased $5 million over the last five years, but there has not been an increase in student enrollment. She asked that the district be more financially responsible when it comes to the budget. She stated that it was important to think about the children but also think about the entire community as she believed it was not affordable for many living here and difficult for families to move into town.

Mrs. Shoemaker inquired about the call to the meeting and the use of tabulators for voting at the referendum. Mr. Neviaser clarified this for her noting the new legislation about the use of tabulators but that the Town of Lyme could opt to using paper ballots.

Mrs. Fogliano made the following clarifications that she believed would help the Board understand some of the comments that were made earlier under public comment:

1. The size of the scope of the PK-8 Building Project has been reduced relative to the enrollment. with the reduction of classrooms from ten to six at Mile Creek School.
2. During the last few budget cycles, the administration and Board of Education devoted funds to reduce the overall amount of borrowing on this project. This has resulted in a lower budget proposal than was anticipated this year. Mr. Neviaser explained that they had originally anticipated a 10.53 percent increase based on the initial projections for debt service.
3. Out of the $3 million in the district's undesignated fund, the Board has already committed a million dollars to potential costs related to renovating the school security vestibules.

4. Surplus monies serve two purposes: (1) Region 18's bond rating stays high and surplus helps favorable bond rating and (2) the importance of maintaining monies in this fund for emergencies and unanticipated needs.
5. After the annual budget audit, the District has put away two percent of the overage into an undesignated fund. This year, the district is considering not putting away as much with more being credited back to the towns.
6. Because of the careful management of monies, favorable interest rates and more state reimbursement than anticipated, the project is costing the towns less than what was voted on at referendum (the project could cost $17 million less than what was voted on at referendum).

Mr. Staab inquired about a list of items he requested detailing what is being accomplished and not being accomplished in the PK-8 project. Mrs. Fogliano reported that they are essentially doing all of what they originally planned for with the exception of the reduction of classrooms at Mile Creek School from 10 to 6.

Mrs. Fogliano also reported that the HVAC systems, along with the solar panels on four of the schools, will be energy efficient and primarily fueled by electricity, and they will be burning 90% less fossil fuel on the campuses causing better environmental conditions and some savings.

Upon a question by Mr. Lodge about the impact to towns, Mr. Neviaser explained that any surplus monies that the district does not put into their undesignated fund is returned to the towns in the form of a bill credit (two years in arrears).

Mr. Lowry reported on the sprinkler reduction in the PK-8 project.

In answer to Mr. Staab's question, Mrs. McCalla, reported that they are at the same percent to budget as last year with May and June remaining. They anticipate returning monies to the towns again this year.

There being no further questions or comments, the District Budget Meeting adjourned at 6:53 p.m. to referendum the following day at the Lyme Town Hall and the Lyme-Old Lyme Middle School in Old Lyme from 12:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m. upon a motion by Mrs. James and a second by Mr. Staab.

Respectfully submitted,

Martha Shoemaker, Secretary