Merrimack School Board Meeting
Merrimack School District, SAU #26
Merrimack Town Hall – Matthew Thornton Room
January 14, 2020

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1. Call to Order

Chair Barnes called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m.

Present: Chair Barnes, Vice Chair Guagliumi, Board Members Nunez, Schoenfeld, and Schneider. Also in attendance were Superintendent McLaughlin, Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction Fabrizio, and Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell.

Excused:

Student Representative Koroma

2. Pledge of Allegiance

Chair Barnes led the Pledge of Allegiance.

3. Public Participation

Mr. Scott Adler addressed the School Board on behalf of concerned Merrimack taxpayers and stated he was under the impression that the roofing was complete and, therefore, did not understand why it was part of the budget under capital expenditures. He also asked why there was a redesign study in the amount of $100,000.

4. Proposed Warrant Articles

Superintendent McLaughlin commented that perhaps item #4 was worded incorrectly. He said he thought the School Board wanted to discuss whether or not the James Mastricola Upper Elementary School roof should be placed on a Warrant Article.

Chair Barnes stated the Warrant Articles that were going to be on the ballot were as follows:

1. Article #1 – Election of Officers (School Board, School Planning and Building Committee and the Budget Committee.

2. The second item guaranteed to be on the Warrant was the budget.

3. The acceptance of gifts, such as land.

Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell noted the following:

- The Master Plan Study – Redesign was part of the operating budget and not part of the Warrant Article discussions.

- The bleachers in the Smith Gym were not in the operating budget but were part of the Warrant Article discussion.

- The window replacement for the high school ($265,000) was included in the operating budget.

- The Brentwood site clearing was included in the operating budget.

Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell said the roofing at the James Mastricola Elementary School ($655,805) and the bleachers in the Smith Gym were the only two items to be discussed for Warrant Articles.

Board Member Nunez asked if they were to put off the roofing project, what the roofs might look like in the next year or two. She further said her concern was that they would have to repair multiple roofs at the same time. Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell replied he had spoken with the roofing consultant and if the School Board chose not to do the roofing project the current year he would not expect the roof to be stacked on top of the Thorntons Ferry project. He said he would expect everything to slide one year.

Vice Chair Guagliumi commented she would prefer to push everything back by a year unless there was a high risk. It would move those costs closer to when the district is slated to have paid its bonded debt. Superintendent McLaughlin replied it was not an imminent risk, however, he pointed out anything could happen.

Board Member Schoenfeld commented she was a pretty strong proponent for maintenance as opposed to deferred maintenance and asked if there was a sense of where all of the roofs were in terms of repair. Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell replied it was acceptable for everything to slide one year.

Board Member Schneider clarified that if the Board did decide to put the roof ($655,805) on a Warrant Article and it failed then per law they were not allowed to use funds to repair it from

any source according to the “no means no” scenario. He said if something needed to be repaired they would have to find funds to make the repair and then make the effort to the replace it in the next budget season.

Chair Barnes asked what the emergency fund balance was. Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell replied at present there was a balance of $350,000.

Chair Barnes asked if it was the will of the Board to have a Warrant Article on the roofing for the James Mastricola Upper Elementary School/James Mastricola Upper Elementary School in the amount of $655,805.

(Recorder’s Note: Chair Barnes took an informal roll call vote.)

Board Member Nunez commented she felt that was the correct approach. Board Member Schoenfeld said she was ambivalent. Board Member Schneider commented he would like to see it as a Warrant Article. Vice Chair Guagliumi commented she was in favor of deferring the item only if they could do the Warrant Article for a reserve fund. Chair Barnes stated her thinking was more aligned with Vice Chair Guagliumi.

Board Member Schoenfeld suggested drafting a Warrant Article until they decide what other Warrant Articles they would have.

Chair Barnes commented that the bleachers in the Smith Gym for $105,000 was not in the operating budget and asked the School Board if they wanted it as a Warrant Article.

Vice Chair Guagliumi asked if the bleachers were safe. Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell replied the bleachers were inspected every year and the maintenance rationale behind replacing the bleachers was that they were not ADA (Americans with Disabilities Act) compliant. Vice Chair Guagliumi asked if there were any penalties for not being compliant. Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell replied there were not as they were grandfathered in. Vice Chair Guagliumi stated she had no problem putting the bleachers on a Warrant Article. Board Member Nunez commented her opinion was to hold off a year and lumping it in with next year.

Board Member Schneider commented he was in support of putting the bleachers on a Warrant Article as well.

Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell noted that the James Mastricola Upper Elementary School floor was original and could not take another sanding so they were thinking after the bleachers came off a new floor could go down as well.

Superintendent McLaughlin mentioned the existing floor was a wood floor and he wanted the material of the new floor to be fully vetted prior to doing the project.

Board Member Schneider suggested creating a Warrant Article and then they could debate it further.

Chair Barnes referred to the Master Plan Study for the redesign of the campus off of Baboosic Lake Road which would include the James Mastricola Elementary School, the James Mastricola Upper Elementary School, the high school complex, as well as the administrative buildings.

Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell said the issue of the SAU (School Administrative Unit) office had been discussed since approximately 1995. He said in addition to the SAU there were three schools located on the street, a lot of community events were held there, and there were parking issues that included lighting. He further said they needed to hire professionals to propose how the area would be best optimized.

Vice Chair Guagliumi asked if the proposed campus redesign was reviewed by the Planning and Building Committee. Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell replied the Committee approved it and it was in the operating budget.

Vice Chair Guagliumi asked if there were ways of getting prototypes without getting the complete engineering analysis. Business Shevenell replied currently it was a rough estimate to mark all of the utilities and do a new survey and come up with approximately three or four different options, noting it could come in less than $100,000 or a little more. Vice Chair Guagliumi stated she was very uncomfortable with the price of $100,000 but absolutely agreed that the SAU offices were substandard. She further stated she felt it was important to have the public's buy-in to do a project of such size.

Chair Barnes asked if they could reach out to Keach & Nordstrom who had done a number of projects for the District to discuss the scope of the facility, what type of design work was needed, and give an estimate as to what that work might cost. Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell agreed to contact Mr. Keach.

Board Member Schneider commented if they wanted the voters to ultimately not only approve doing a study but also doing the work that included a SAU/SPED combined office as well as the reconstruction of parking, the had to win their support for the project. He said he felt they should get the input of the voters to make them part of the process from ground zero had a lot of value. He said he would like to spend the current budget year proactively engaging the

public to talk about what the plan was and get their input before they spend their money on a plan. He further said he was not in favor of putting it in a separate Warrant Article because there was not a lot of context around it.

Board Member Schoenfeld said she felt she would like to have some expert sense of the cost apart from their guess but ultimately she felt also felt it was important to note that it wasn't simply paying someone to bring them ideas but it also including knowing the parameters.

Board Member Nunez noted she felt it was important to express how much of an impact there would be to their learners because the overall plan included so much more than just the administration buildings, i.e. the high school building.

Vice Chair Guagliumi commented one option was to put it on a Warrant Article and then provide some informational sessions for the public prior to the day of voting.

Board Member Schoenfeld commented she would be concerned with it going on a Warrant Article without first knowing what it would restrict them from doing if it were voted in the negative.

Chair Barnes clarified that currently, it was in the operating budget. She further clarified the two items regarding Warrant Articles were the roofing and the bleachers which would be drafted. In addition, she said the other Warrant Article to be drafted was the surplus going into the emergency fund.

Chair Barnes asked the members of the School Board if there were any other discussions regarding Warrant Articles prior to moving on. There were none.

5. Budget Discussion

Chair Barnes stated the Board was presented with a budget, which after their adjustments at the last meeting, based on actual enrollments went down to approximately $80,667,742, she noted that number was $400,000 over the default budget.

Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell stated the original default number was $80,714,517 but then the health insurance enrollments were more accurately projected which subtracted $450,104 so the new default number was $80,264,413.

Superintendent McLaughlin mentioned the original budget presented was approximately $81 million and then via a conversation between Board Member Schneider and Assistant

Superintendent for Business Shevenell about the insurance being recalculated based on actual enrollments. He said after that happened it brought the budgeted amount down by $450,000 which meant both the budgeted amount and the default went down by the same amount but there were still $400,000 over the default budget.

Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell explained the current budget (minus the $451,004) was $80,667,742. Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell said the default budget was $80,264,413.

Board Member Schneider moved (seconded by Board Member Schoenfeld) to remove the $450,000 from both the proposed budget as well as the default budget to start.

The motion passed 5 – 0 – 0.

Chair Barnes noted that Superintendent McLaughlin and his administrative team came up with four options in an effort to bring the proposed 2020 – 2021 budget below the default budget. Superintendent McLaughlin invited the School Board to select one option or pick and choose items from different options.

Option #1 - Infrastructure (which included)

- Windows at Merrimack High School - $265,000
- Furniture replacement at each of the schools:
    - James Mastricola Elementary School - $6,588
    - Reeds Ferry Elementary School - $5,466
    - Thorntons Ferry Elementary School - $16,460
    - James Mastricola Upper Elementary School - $9,422
    - Merrimack Middle School - $5,000
    - Merrimack High School - $10,610
- Demolishing of the Brentwood building - $125,000

Superintendent McLaughlin explained Option #1 would be $40,217 below the default budget.

Option #2 – Infrastructure, Brentwood, and the Master Plan

- Windows at Merrimack High School - $265,000
- Furniture replacement at each of the schools:
    - James Mastricola Elementary School - $6,588
    - Reeds Ferry Elementary School - $5,466
    - Thorntons Ferry Elementary School - $16,460

  - James Mastricola Upper Elementary School - $9,422
  - Merrimack Middle School - $5,000
  - Merrimack High School - $10,610
- Demolishing of the Brentwood building - $125,000
- Master Plan Redesign Study - $100,000

Superintendent McLaughlin explained Option #2 would be $140,217 below the default budget.

Option #3 – Infrastructure, Personnel

- Windows at Merrimack High School - $265,000
- System of Care Coordinator Position - $50,000
- Drainage at Merrimack Middle School - $75,000
- Choral Risers at Merrimack High School - $12,550
- Binding of Books - $800.00

Superintendent McLaughlin explained Option #3 would be $21.00 below the default budget.

Option #4 – Infrastructure, Curriculum Guided Student Experiences, and Remedial Supports

- Windows at Merrimack High School - $265,000
- Field Trips - $32,008
- Remove Charter School Buses - $41,179
- Transitional Academic Support (includes Evening Academy, summer reading, and the credit recovery programs at the high school) - $85,000

Superintendent McLaughlin explained Option #4 would be $19,858.00 below the default budget.

Discussion Regarding Option #1:

Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell stated the windows at the Merrimack High School was a two-year plan and appeared on the CIP (Capital Improvement Plan.) He said there were some windows where the seals were broken and were using mechanical devices to lock them at night. He said even though the windows were compromised they were not losing a lot of energy and felt they could definitely wait for another year.

Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell, referring to the Brentwood demolishing for $125,000 said it would leave a flat site and perhaps could be used as a gravel parking lot on

a temporary basis pending a decision on what would be done with the entire complex. He said they would not demo the building but leave it there for the time being with minimal heat and noted it was currently being used by the police department as a training facility.

Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell said the remainder was the elimination of all of the replacement furniture which they would put off for a year.

Board Member Nunez noted she was concerned that the dollar amount of $16,459 at the Thorntons Ferry was to furnish the two classes that would be needed as there would be two additional teachers at the school. Superintendent McLaughlin replied that was an error and they should have included the Thorntons Ferry furniture replacements and that number would be adjusted to reflect the two classrooms. Chair Barnes estimated it would be a reduction of approximately $5,000.

Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell commented if the Brentwood building was completely boarded off and all utilities were shut off it could be considered an abandoned building which would save approximately $20,000, he pointed out, however, it would cost approximately $5,000 to board it up.

Board Member Schneider commented it would cost approximately $165,000 to tear down the Brentwood building or spend $20,000 to keep it functional so the police department could continue using it for training. He added a boarded-up building may increase the chance of vandalism. Further, he said he would be willing to support the removal of the teardown but retaining the $27,000 to keep it functional through the budget year.

Discussion Regarding Option #2:

Board Member Schoenfeld asked in addition to the cost of the furniture itself if there was a moral or personnel cost to being told, “no, you can’t have three science chairs because we are cutting the budget in a variety of ways.” Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction Fabrizio ensured when a piece of furniture was no longer safe it was discarded.

Discussion Regarding Option #3:

Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction Fabrizio stated the District would benefit significantly from the addition of a System of Care Coordinator. He said it would move the District forward but without the position, they would keep doing what they were currently doing.

Board Member Nunez commented that she felt the position of a System of Care Coordinator was definitely needed and said she felt it was not an option to cut in her mind.

Superintendent McLaughlin clarified there was not a contractual obligation or a state requirement that required them to have the System of Care Coordinator position.

Chair Barnes read aloud from the job description for the System of Care Coordinator position as summarized below:

"The System of Care Coordinator will facilitate, monitor, and educate staff on current practices that build a system of care in the Merrimack community. This includes facilitating and collaborating as part of the District's Mental Health Committee and connecting families to resources beyond the schools."

Vice Chair Guagliumi shared that she too felt the position was necessary. Vice Chair Guagliumi stated when she looked at potential budget cuts her first priority was to cut things that did not impact learning and did not impacting students in a strong and meaningful way.

Vice Chair Guagliumi asked if the windows at the Merrimack High School could be broken out or if they could consider putting it on a Warrant Article. Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell replied he would draft a Warrant Article for the windows.

Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell explained the drainage issue at the Merrimack Middle School was to mitigate the condition at the upper field. He said the hill was leaching water onto the field and from that point, it permeated the entire field.

Vice Chair Guagliumi asked if they were confident that putting $75,000 into the field that it would work or were they just dealing with "Mother Nature." Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell replied they were fairly confident that it would work, however, if it did not do the job to their satisfaction it would still make things a lot better.

Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell said the existing choral rises were old and could be of a safety concern but they could go another year. Superintendent McLaughlin noted that Ms. Putney had indicated she felt the choral risers were at the end of their useful life and may not be usable the following year.

Discussion Regarding Option #4:

Superintendent McLaughlin mentioned field ranged from everything from going to see how maple sugar was made to seeing real art at the Currier Museum, and learning about civics when the students visited the State House in Concord. He said while they were all related to curriculum, they were not stated mandated or required by any minimum standard.

Superintendent McLaughlin also indicated transitional academic support that involved the three programs which were comprised of Evening Academy, Summer Reading, the 8.5 program, and credit recovery. Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction Fabrizio said the students would not have access to these important programs if they were cut and some needed those programs to successfully graduate.

Chair Barnes stated she was not comfortable with taking away supports that would help students graduate.

Vice Chair Guagliumi stated it was her opinion regarding Option #4 a big X could be drawn right across it with the exception of the windows and the charter school bus because it had been a placeholder for a number of years and they did not need it.

Vice Chair Guagliumi stated all of the field trips and in particular, the academic support should stay in the budget as she felt it was critical. She further stated she was of the same mind-set as Chair Barnes in terms of the windows and the charter buses.

Superintendent McLaughlin commented he felt it was important to discuss the four teachers and the kindergarten assistants which were the reason they were over the default. He said he did not include those four positions because they would not have included them in the budget if they did not feel very strongly that they needed them, however, whatever the School Board saw fit to do they would make it work. In summary, Superintendent McLaughlin said the difference of adding four teachers did not seem dramatic in terms of the ratios, however, there is a demonstrable increase in enrollment, adding that 109 students had enrolled in the Merrimack School District since October 1st.

Board Member Schneider commented the only thing he would entertain in terms of a discussion would be the extra kindergarten teacher at the Thorntons Ferry Elementary School because based on the projections it was the area growing the least. Superintendent McLaughlin stated he did not share that opinion but if the School Board wanted to consider that option he said he felt it would be important to have Mrs. Deluca, Principal, Thorntons Ferry Elementary School speak with the School Board.

Board Member Schneider asked if there were any other Board members who were of the same belief as he was regarding the kindergarten teacher.

(Recorder's Note: Chair Barnes took an informal roll call vote.)
Chair Barnes indicated she would not be in support of such a cut. Vice Chair Guagliumi also agreed the position should not be cut. Board Member Schoenfeld and Board Member Nunez both stated the felt the position should be kept.

Superintendent McLaughlin commented that the previous week Board Member Schneider asked if they were seeing downward trends in student course selections at the high school. Superintendent McLaughlin replied historically, over time, under-enrolled classes were Mandarin and Arabic but there was a downward trend. Superintendent McLaughlin said Merrimack High School had always tried to provide students with their preferences, noting they had a 96% success rate.

Board Member Schneider made it clear that he was not proposing to cut positions for the sake of a budget pokey figure. He said when he first looked at the original population numbers it looked like there may have been some economies to say, "was the high school staffing appropriate given the volume of kids coming in." He said it was unclear to him, based on the new numbers, some of which jumped up significantly, that is was a prudent discussion to have.

Board Member Schneider stated when decreases in population were looked it, usually core classes were looked at such as math or English and if the ratios were appropriate within those given the population and if there was an opportunity to reduce. He said when the student population was dropping a math and English teacher was cut. He said he would like to revisit the staffing at high school and would like the School Board to take a position that they were in support of having a Mandarin teacher. Superintendent McLaughlin replied he did not add or suggest a reduction at the high school because they currently felt they were appropriately staffed.

(Recorder's Note: Chair Barnes took an informal roll call vote.)

Chair Barnes stated she was in favor of keeping the Mandarin, Arabic, Latin, Spanish, and French course were all very valuable assets to the course catalog. Vice Chair Guagliumi, Board Member Schoenfeld, and Board Member Nunez also agreed the course was valuable. Board Member Schneider mentioned the diversity of courses the District offered was attractive to people who wanted to move to Merrimack or sell their home. He said he probably was not as passionate about the world language program but agreed the options that the high school provided gave the students more opportunity when they reached college.

Chair Barnes asked the School Board what they wanted to work on in an effort to prepare the administrators to work towards those numbers.

Board Member Schneider stated the Collective Bargaining Agreement with the Merrimack Teachers Association allowed them to add healthcare plans every year and per the contract, they could not introduce any new plans to their options after January 1st so they were past that point. He said, however, the Board needed to be proactive going into the next budget year in looking healthcare options that could be added to it which would allow a broader choice for teachers that reduce the overall cost to the District.

Board Member Schneider said when he looked at what the District had in terms of overall benefits and staffing he did not see a big turn of the knob for the current year, however, he also saw in the various options provided by the administration, in his mind he created a number that allowed them to get within slightly below $80 million. He said it would cut approximately $660,000 off of the proposed budget that did not impact student services and allowed the opportunity to move some of the items on Warrant Articles to allow the voters to choose.

Board Member Schneider stated current operating budget which was $80,667,742 and he proposed the following cuts:

- Remove Windows - $265,000 (Place on a Warrant Article)
- Remove $100,000 Campus Plan
- Remove $125,000 Brentwood Tear Down

Board Member Schneider commented the three items alone totaled $490,000 in reductions.

- Drainage at the Middle School - $75,000 (Delay by one year)
- Remove the Charter School Bus - $41,179
- Transportation for Vocational – Cut $25,000 from that line item bringing it to $150,000
- Furniture - $53,546 – Cut $25,000 from that line item bringing it to $28,546

Board Member Schneider stated the all of his proposed reductions would remove $656,179 from the proposed operating budget which would bring the operating budget down to $80,011,563. He said his goal was to get the number down to $80 million or just below.

Vice Chair Guagliumi mentioned she would like to see the data she requested prior to making her decision on the field at the Merrimack Middle School. She said she also removed the amount of $100,000 for the Master Plan Redesign study, the windows at a cost of $265,000, and the $41,179 for the charter buses. Vice Chair Guagliumi noted she was also in favor of reducing the vocational transportation by $25,000.

Board Member Schneider asked the administration to review the proposed budget for additional items (in the amount of $12,000) that could be removed from the operating budget in order to bring the operating budget below $80 million.

Board Member Schoenfeld stated she also had similar thoughts but was not thrilled at the idea of cutting furniture.

Board Member Nunez stated she felt the $100,000 for the Master Plan Study should be moved to a Warrant Article. She said she also took out the windows, the choral risers, and

removed the furniture with the exception of the Thorntons Ferry Elementary School. Board Member Nunez said she would really like to see the Brentwood building taken down and the space could be utilized more effectively but the bigger challenge was the dollar amount.

Superintendent McLaughlin commented if it was not the will of the School Board to have the Master Plan Redesign Study then he would not think it would be a great idea to anything with the Brentwood building presently because he did not think it was wise to take something down without realizing the entire full usage. Chair Barnes stated she agreed with Superintendent McLaughlin's thoughts.

Chair Barnes said she felt the will of the School Board was to get the operating budget to at or under $80 million and the goal was to put forth the operating budget at the January 16, 2020, School Board meeting.

Board Member Nunez commented that one cut she was not in favor of was the Merrimack Middle School field because while one could argue that it did not necessarily impact their learners, their learners also participated in sporting events that took place on the field and it was also used by the community.

6. Public Comments on Agenda Items

Ms. Tracy Bull, 5 Independence Drive, addressed the Board and commented it was the finding of the Master Plan Steering Committee in 2012 – 2013 that the SAU buildings were given the poorest condition rating and the highest urgency of need of replacement. She said she was hopeful that the School Board would be very proactive at working with visibility with the School Planning and Building Committee because their meetings were not televised.

Ms. Bull said she felt the foreign language courses offered in the Merrimack School District were very important.

Mr. Chuck Mower, 4 Depot Street, addressed the Board and said he had listened intently to the recommendations of the administration. He said he was not getting a very clear message from the School Board regarding what they cherished. Mr. Mower commented that he felt if the Board adopted all of the cuts that were discussed they would be advancing an imprudent budget for the consideration of the School Budget Committee.

Adjournment

At 10:52 p.m. Board Member Nunez moved (seconded by Board Member Schoenfeld) to adjourn.

The motion passed 5– 0 – 0.