Role of the Budget Committee

Overview

The role of the Budget Committee is primarily to provide a lay review of the proposed budget in the context of the Board of Directors' established goals and priorities.

The Budget Committee is charged with holding one or more meetings to:

- Receive the budget message and the budget document;
- Provide members of the public an opportunity to ask questions about and comment upon the budget document; and
- Approve the budget document as submitted by the budget officer or as revised and prepared by the budget committee.

Duties of the Budget Committee

The budget committee meets publicly to review the budget document as proposed by the budget officer. The committee receives the proposed budget and the budget message and holds at least one meeting in which the public may ask questions about and comment on the budget.

The budget committee plays a large role in providing communication with the community about the budget process and limitations within which the district works. Committee members develop a good understanding of the district's fiscal constraints and the programs funded and are able to explain those things to their friends and neighbors throughout the community. The committee also provides an important additional conduit for input from the community of their priorities for the district. One of the committee's most important duties is to hear and consider any testimony presented by the public about the budget.

Guiding Questions

As described above, the primary task of the budget committee is one of lay review. Budget Committee members may consider the following series of questions.

1. Does the budget proposal seem to advance the mission and goals as described by the Board of Directors?
2. Does it appear to align and support the strategies and results described by staff in the Comprehensive Strategic Plan?
3. Has the staff demonstrated how budget initiatives are supported by best practice, literature and/or research?
4. Has the staff identified how the success of initiatives may be measured?
5. Does the budget proposal reasonably balance provision of services to children next year versus continuing financial viability of the school district?

Oregon Law
The budget committee is a local government's fiscal planning advisory committee. The governing body of each local government must establish a budget committee (ORS 294.414, renumbered from 294.336). The budget committee is composed of the governing body and an equal number of electors appointed by the governing body.

An elector is a qualified voter who, for example, has the right to vote for a ballot measure submitted by the local government. If, after a good faith attempt, the governing body cannot find a sufficient number of registered voters who are willing to serve, the budget committee becomes those who are willing plus the governing body. If no willing electors can be found, the governing body is the budget committee [ORS 294.414(2), renumbered from 294.336(2)].

The appointive members of the budget committee cannot be officers, agents or employees of the local government [ORS 294.414(4), renumbered from 294.336(4)]. An agent, generally, is someone who is authorized to act for the local government, or who can make commitments or sign contracts in the name of the local government. This is sometimes a grey area if an appointee candidate already serves on other advisory committees or commissions of a local government. If you are in doubt about whether a particular person is an agent, consult your legal counsel. Spouses of officers, agents or employees of the local government may serve on the budget committee if they are qualified electors and not themselves officers, agents, or employees.

Appointive members of the budget committee are appointed for three-year terms. The terms must be staggered so that about one-third of the terms end each year [ORS 294.414(5), renumbered from 294.336(5)]. Appointed budget committee members may be reappointed for additional terms, at the discretion of the governing body. If an appointive member of the budget committee is unable to complete the term, or resigns before the term is over, the governing body must appoint another elector to serve out the unexpired portion of the term [ORS 294.414(6), renumbered from 294.336(6)]. There is no provision in budget law for "stand-by" or "alternate" appointed members.

All members of the budget committee have equal authority. Each member's vote counts the same. Any member can be elected by the committee as its chair. No member of the budget committee (including governing body members) may receive any compensation for their services as a member of the budget committee [ORS 294.414(3), renumbered from 294.336(3)].