REGIONAL SCHOOL DISTRICT NO. 7
Newbury Library Media Center
Board of Education Budget Workshop
March 4, 2026 – 6:00 p.m.
APPROVED 3.11.26

PRESENT: Chair Ms. Molly Sexton Read (B), Ms. Kim Crone (N), Ms. Mimi Duran (B), Ms. Deb Bell (N), Secretary / Treasurer, Mr. Noel Gauthier (NH), Vice-Chair Mr. Robert Jerram (NH), Ms. Terri Kenneson (C), and Superintendent Steven K. LePage.
Absent: Ms. Lisa Fragale

1.0 CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order at 6:02 p.m. by Ms. Sexton Read.

2.0 PUBLIC PORTION

Rich Winn, Barkhamsted BOF chair: Expressed appreciation for Northwestern Regional's proposed budget. Shared that they are facing heavy budget pressure at the elementary level due to Special Education costs.

Mike Sconyers, Norfolk BOF Chair: Dealing with significant capital projects, including a $10M firehouse, a $1M fire truck, and ongoing road repairs.

Dan Jerram, New Hartford First Selectman: Acknowledged the Board's work in reducing staff and shared his efforts to address the ECS (Education Cost Sharing) grant on the state level. He urged a unified front to lobby legislators for a "foundation grant floor" to ensure small towns aren't disproportionately cut.

Henry Tirrell, Norfolk First Selectman: arrived after the public portion and was provided a recap by the Chair.

3.0 Budget Discussion:

Superintendent LePage shared budget highlights:

Proposed 2.1% Increase

- **Staffing:** Includes the reduction of four teaching positions through a strategic retirement incentive program.

- **Healthcare:** Facing a 3rd consecutive year of double-digit increases. The district explored the State Partnership Plan but found it unfavorable due to loss ratios and group size. Rates on the Partnership Plan have also risen significantly, making it less attractive.
- **Strategic Plan:** The 5-year plan (developed Fall 2025) focuses on:
    - **AI in Education:** A curriculum audit and revision is needed to adjust to the impacts of AI (aligning curriculum, instruction, and assessment to be more "durable" rather than vulnerable to AI completion).
    - **Career Pathways:** Administration is exploring a pilot program with EdAdvance and the Department of Labor's support for 8th-grade/Freshman seminar-based career exploration and development of career pathway awareness and opportunities throughout high school (and career opportunities beyond high school).
- **Facilities:** Northwestern is slated to receive a **DRIP grant of $59,523.24** (managed through the Office of Policy and Management, OPM) each year for two years for less significant facility upgrades, which will help offset expenditures on these items, and potentially be beneficial to the assessment offset.

Board members asked questions seeking clarification on a few line items:

Item	Status/Reason
High School Principals/Middle School Principals' pay change imbalance	Difference due to negotiating out longevity pay.
Athletics/Coaches	3% contractual increase; added assistant slots to reflect actual needs.
Tech Ed Transport	Significant increase due to "singleton" routes that cannot be combined for the state technical school options our students have.
Business Dept.	Reflects staffing shifts and related course coverage adjustments.
Legal Fees	Proposed reduction from $50k to $40k (post-contract negotiations).

The Board discussed the strategic plan and related shifts that have been planned for some staffing and agreed that they can support the proposed shifts. A vote will be held on this item at the March 11 Regular Board of Education meeting.

General budget discussion continued.

Motion by Rob Jerram, seconded by Noel Gauthier, to **ADJOURN** the meeting at 7:00 p.m. AYE: Ms. Sexton Read, Mr. Jerram, Mr. Gauthier, Ms. Crone, Ms. Kenneson, Ms. Bell, Ms. Duran NAY: None.