REGIONAL SCHOOL DISTRICT NO. 7

New Hartford
Budget Presentation
April 7, 2026 – 7:00 p.m.
APPROVED 4.20.26

PRESENT: Chair Ms. Molly Sexton Read (B), Vice-Chair Mr. Robert Jerram (NH), Ms. Deborah Bell (N), Mr. Noel Gauthier (NH), Ms. Mimi Duran (B), Superintendent Steven K. LePage, Director of Finance & Operations Mr. James Gaskins.

CALL TO ORDER: Ms. Kerry Guilfoyle called the Proposed Budget Meeting 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 with an overview of where the budget proposal currently stands.

- **Budget Commitments & Vision:** The proposal is driven by commitments to transparency, conscientious resource management, and the maintenance of high-quality education aligned with the "Vision of a Graduate" attributes.
- **Historical Context:**
  - Proposed Budget Increase: 1.74%.
  - Proposed Assessment Increase: 1.73% (minimized due to revenues and designated assessment offsets).
- **Budget Drivers & Cost Controls:**
  - **Special Education:** Outplacements are lower than in previous years. The district is budgeting conservatively regarding state Excess Cost grant reimbursement, projecting approximately 70% reimbursement.
  - **Benefits:** Anthem's rate increase was at 9.4% before this meeting, but it has since been announced that there will be a decrease. Further reductions have not yet been incorporated into this budget. Discussion on this will take place at the Special Meeting following the budget presentation.
  - **Salaries:** Contractual settlements remain high statewide, but costs were mitigated via Board-approved retirement incentives.
  - **Efficiency Measures:** The district is transitioning to a full suite of ADP programs for payroll, time/attendance, and insurance. While this implementation has associated costs, it will yield immediate efficiencies and, ultimately, a reduction in staffing needs within the business office.

- **School Highlights & Needs:**
    - **Middle School:** Focus on a Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) for behavioral/academic support, mental health resources, and Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS), utilizing behavioral reinforcement tickets to acknowledge students for positive behaviors within the school community.
    - **High School:** Highlighted pictures included the pep band, House of Heroes community project, theater productions, and the upcoming Financial Reality Fair. Highlighted data points included strong AP and dual credit course participation, with high success rates (scores of 3 or higher). SAT scores for the Class of 2026 show significant cohort growth, exceeding state averages.
- **Object Breakdown (Major Changes):**
    - **Salaries:** Net increase of $75,493 (0.60%), despite a 4.4% contractual increase for teachers, due to five retirements and the need to replace only one of those positions. This object category includes an expansion of the Athletic Director position, resulting in a full-time position titled Director of Athletics and Student Affairs. There is also a placeholder for the salary of after-school-hours security staff.
    - **Benefits:** Total increase of $265,713, representing two-thirds of the overall budget increase.
    - **Professional/Technical Services:** Increased nearly 10%, driven by Shared Services assessment (up 3.45%), ADP software implementation, and instructional technology cost increases.
    - **Property Services:** Increased 2.83%. Noted an increase in snow removal costs (9.28%).
    - **Other Purchased Services:** Declined by $208,334 or 5.79% due to lower special education transportation and tuition costs, combined with $242,000 in Excess Cost Grant offsets.
    - **Supplies:** Increased due to necessary textbook replacements for High School Science and Social Studies, among other supply account needs, reflecting higher supply costs.
    - **Capital Outlay:** Maintaining flat funding at $200,000.

Town Assessments: Based on shifts in Average Daily Membership (ADM)

- Barkhamsted: 2.23% increase.
- Colebrook: 1.91% decrease.
- New Hartford: 1.88% increase.
- Norfolk: 3.72% increase.

Ms. Sexton Read opened the floor for comments and questions. One community member asked several follow-up questions, including:

- Are we paying for the costs of students who don't come from our sending towns? (No, there is a per-pupil cost determined by the average cost per student, and students who attend from other towns pay tuition at that rate.
- How is the assessed tax calculated? (Addressed by Ms. Guilfoyle)

- Where do rental fees come from? (Ms. Sexton Read shared sources of rentals from building use by outside organizations renting building spaces)
- Do teachers contribute to their health insurance? (Ms. Sexton Read shared that they do pay a share of the insurance cost per their contract).
- Who are our auditors, and why do we use them when there could be cheaper options? Why don't we have a less extensive audit conducted? (Ms. Sexton Read responded that we have been happy with this company, and that the audit includes the required components of the State of Connecticut. Ms. Sexton Read also shared that we would take her recommendation to look at other companies under advisement.)
- Why do we pay for students through age 21? (Ms. Sexton Read shared that this is per state law requirements. Superintendent LePage shared that the HTA Program takes out-of-district tuition students, which more than offsets the costs of this program and serves as a revenue through Shared Services, which oversees this program.)

Another community member asked where the expenses for the retirement incentive are coming from. (Ms. Sexton Read shared that these costs were included in the budget being presented, and explained the two options of $10,000 cash, or a year of the insurance coverage at the contracted cost share).

Another resident asked how much the cost is per student. (Ms. Sexton Read shared the per pupil expenditure slide information again and showed that it was just under $30,000 for the current year, due to lower enrollment and increased costs.)

Another community member expressed concerns over any increase and made remarks about the need to have no increase, among suggestions to freeze contracts and reduce our budget. (Ms. Sexton Read listened and shared the challenge of rising costs and the need to balance costs while ensuring an excellent education.)

The budget presentation ended at 7:40 p.m.