New Hartford Public Schools
Board of Education Special Meeting (In-Person)
Ann Antolini Elementary School - Library
6:00PM on Thursday April 3, 2025

PRESENT: Superintendent Jeffrey Sousa; Chairman Timothy Klepps; Vice Chairman Thomas Buzzi

Board Members: Megan Albert, Penny Miller (Board Secretary); Erik Perotti; Frank Rodenberg; Timothy Russell, Deirdre Tindall (Virtual) and Kristin Young

Additional Present: Members of the public

Chairman Timothy Klepps called the special meeting to order at 6:00PM.

A. Pledge of Allegiance

B. Board of Education Chair Report
Chairman Klepps announced this meeting was schedule to prepare for the Board of Finance meeting on Tuesday April 8, 2025. Mr. Klepps acknowledges all communications prior to today (25), and communications received since the last meeting (29). There has been a total of (54) communications to the Board of Education, in addition to public comment.

Mr. Klepps informed the Board that at the Public Budget Hearing with the Board of Finance on Tuesday April 1, 2025, there were probably 30 to 40 individuals in the room related to the local Board of Education budget (specifically eliminations), approximately 20 individuals got up to speak supporting the band/music program, School Counselor, White Memorial and Talented & Gifted/ Math Olympiads. He noted not many questions were asked but rather more comments not in favor of several of the eliminations. The band program was a major discussion, there were two who spoke about consolidation and getting creative with the budget or increasing classroom sizes.

The education budget is about 80% of the overall budget between local education and Region 7. The overall proposed increase is 5.37% for all budgets, the actual increase will come later, from the Board of Finance at next Tuesday's meeting. Chairman Klepps thanks everyone on the Board and folks in the community who came out to voice their concerns.

C. Discuss and Take Action on 2025-2026 Board of Education Budget

Chairman Klepps informed members of the Board that there is the opportunity to make a change to the previous proposed budget for the Board of Finance meeting on Tuesday April 8, 2025. He questioned, as a Board, do they choose to move forward with the budget previously voted on or reconsider other options and discuss a different proposed budget. Frank Rodenberg questioned Mr. Klepps on the process, he clarified the Board of Finance approved the budget to go to public hearing, they did not approve or deny the proposed budget for referendum. This means the Board of Finance has not indicated they were satisfied or dissatisfied with the proposed budget of 4.99%. Chairman Klepps requested to have further discussion on the current proposed budget, before the next Board of Finance meeting.

MOTION by Timothy Klepps to rescind the 2025-2026 Board of Education adopted budget of $10,325,026 for further action and discussion. Second by Timothy Russell.

Discussion included the process of altering an approved budget and actions taken by the Board of Finance.

Aye: Megan Albert, Thomas Buzzi, Timothy Klepps, Erik Perotti, Frank Rodenberg, Timothy Russell, Deirdre Tindall and Kristin Young
Naye: Penny Miller
Abstain:

(8-1-0)
Motion Passes

There have been new developments regarding the bus contract – the contract has been issued and signed today which indicates a savings of $120,000, in addition to the retirement of Janet Terenzi, the Administrative Assistant to the Superintendent. This position would be hired on a lower pay scale, as Ms. Terenzi has been an employee for 20 years, which adds savings of approximately $15,000. In addition, the original non-lapsing account has about $114,000. The current project overage ($56,330) of the 2024-2025 school year, will be deducted to balance the current year and there is potential for the remaining to be used for the next school year to offset outplacement costs, for example. There is a major variability in outplacements tuition as the number is projected. Chairman Klepps has asked Superintendent Sousa to review the eliminations previously discussed and review the items based on the funds available from the savings in the bus contract.

MOTION by Timothy Klepps to use $60,000 of funding from the non-lapsing account and apply to the 2025-2026 budget against the variability in the outplacement costs projected. Second by Kristin Young.

Thomas Buzzi disagrees with using funding from the non-lapsing account, spending money out of this account is a band aid approach. Meagan Albert asked if there were any ramifications to zeroing out this account. Thomas Buzzi requested to explore other options before taking from the non-lapsing account.

To clarify the non-lapsing would not be zeroed out, in 2023-2024 the Board voted to put $107,000 in, which will remain, this 115,000 is a separate non-lapsing account built from many years ago, there will still be 107,000 in the non-lapsing account as motioned in the last meeting.

Timothy Klepps pulled back his motion and Kristin Young pulled back her second.

Chairman Klepps also announced to the other Board Members, that the New Hartford Board of Education has been more conservative than Region 7 regarding the ECG (Excess Cost Grant). If using the same rate as Region 7, the New Hartford Board of Education would project $120,000, anticipating another $7,000 in savings.

Frank Rodenberg clarified by restoring band (music program), School Counselor, Talented & Gifted/Math Olympiads and White Memorial with the savings, not including non-lapsing there is $142,000, those four items total under $142,000, which would keep the budget at 4.99%.

Chairman Klepps asked Superintendent Sousa to propose to the Board of Education after the savings to date, what he would recommend bringing back into the budget.

Superintendent Sousa recommends in the order of most important with the savings of the bus contract to bring back to the budget: the School Counselor (allowing for the opportunity to give mental health support every day, five days a week in all schools) and to bring back .6 FTE music teacher as high priority. If additional funds to add back Talented & Gifted/Math Olympiads and White Memorial.

Deirdre Tindall questioned the previous discussion the Board of Education had regarding funding grant hired positions, specifically in reference to the School Counselor position, if this was previously funded by a grant. Chairman Klepps briefly ran numbers and stated if the School Counselor, .6FTE band/music teacher, White Memorial and Talented & Gifted/Math Olympiads were reinstated to the budget, this could be done due to recent savings without increasing the 4.99% or adjusting the Excess Cost Grant projection.

Thomas Buzzi proposed cuts to the number of administrative employees, rather than teachers or staff who directly are taken away from the children. Mr. Buzzi asked: can the number of administrative staff be explored to determine if all are needed? Mr. Sousa asked the Board how many administrative positions have been cut prior to his career in New Hartford. Mr. Sousa feels he is very efficient and would like historical information regarding the topic. Penny Miller states there have not been any administrative positions cut for as long as she has been on the Board. The re-occurring pattern seems to be once an individual gets hired, they have a tendency to come back and stay. Members (Buzzi, Miller & Klepps) agree to not rehire. Mr. Perotti felt the Clerical Aide position was important for security, that it was necessary to increase the number of people in the office at any given time. Frank Rodenberg doesn't wish to let people go, he is in favor of not rehiring after a retirement such as the administrative assistant, to keep the Clerical Aide and Instructional Assistant. Mr. Buzzi asked Superintendent Sousa to explain the difference between CJR and the School Counselor. The School Counselor is in the school five days a week, whereas CJR provides counseling outside of school days and is not in the school five days, but rather 1 day a week. Timothy Russell questioned the positions of the Instructional Assistant and Clerical Aide versus the School Counselor. Neither position overlaps with mental health, the School Counselor is a licensed position.

Penny Miller read a letter she wrote aloud to the other Board of Education members. She does not agree with cutting several items, although Ms. Miller does not agree with increasing the budget, she has expressed ways to save money such as consolidation.

MOTION by Timothy Klepps to accept Superintendent Sousa's proposal based on the developments of a savings of $120,000 in the bus contract and $15,000 in the projected Administrative Assistant's retirement, a total of $135,000 in savings to 2025-2026 budget to remove the eliminations for the School Counselor—$71,500, .6 FT (5th & 6th Grade) Music Teacher—$48,000, Talented & Gifted/Math Olympiads—$5,000 and White Memorial—$10,150 for a total of $134,650. Second by Penny Miller.

Aye: Meagan Albert, Timothy Klepps, Penny Miller, Erik Perotti, Frank Rodenberg, Timothy Russell, Deirdre Tindall and Kristin Young
Naye: Thomas Buzzi
Abstain:

(8-1-0)
Motion Passes

MOTION by Thomas Buzzi to instruct Superintendent Sousa to explore (study/review) combining the Administrative Assistant in Central Office with the Director of Student Services Administrative Assistant, to hire back either the Instructional Assistant or Clerical Aide previously cut. Second by Timothy Klepps.

For clarification both the Instructional Assistant (20) and Clerical Aide (24) are part-time positions. Mr. Klepps clarified this motion is to explore the combining of the Director of Student Services to take on the role of assisting Superintendent Sousa. During the extended absences, there was a lot of planning and preparation, there are longer hours on the backend, and they may need to stay after. The overtime in Central Office gets used up quickly. Penny Miller and Erik Perotti both agree that combining two full-time jobs into one will not work. Thomas Buzzi wishes to see the student impact lessened. Mr. Perotti reminds the Board of the impact of the Clerical Aide and Instructional Assistant has to the students. There was discussion and Mr. Buzzi still feels he wishes to discuss further cuts on the administrative level.

Aye: Megan Albert, Thomas Buzzi, Timothy Klepps, Frank Rodenberg, Timothy Russell, Deirdre Tindall and Kristin Young
Naye: Penny Miller and Erik Perotti
Abstain:

(7-2-0)
Motion Passes

MOTION by Erik Perotti to approve applying $66,000 from the non-lapsing account against outplacement tuition and use savings to remove the elimination of the Instructional Assistant at $29,000 and the Clerical Aide at $37,000. Second by Timothy Russell.

Frank Rodenberg expressed the need to look long-term into how these items will be funded in years to come. Deirdre Tindall agreed, what is the plan for next year? Mr. Perotti states to the public voting it will not look good if there is $200,000 in an account and the Board of Education chooses to cut two positions. Timothy Russell said that the more you take from Special Education, it is going to eventually hurt Regular Education. Erik Perotti stated some students will move onto Region 7 and Penny Miller reminded that the Town will still have half the cost. But Erik Perotti noted this cost will not be in the local Board of Education budget. The number of students that receive services in Special Education is high in New Hartford. But the fact is good schools attract people, which is why New Hartford has more in Special Education, according to Mr. Perotti. Regular Education benefits greater from the positions of the Instructional Assistant and Clerical Aide than Special Education.

Aye: Megan Albert, Erik Perotti, Frank Rodenberg, Timothy Russell, and Kristin Young
Naye: Thomas Buzzi, Timothy Klepps, Penny Miller and Deirdre Tindall
Abstain:

(5-4-0)
Motion Passes

MOTION by Thomas Buzzi to adopt the 2025-2026 budget for $10,324,676 at 4.99% increase and send to the budget to the Board of Finance. Second by Frank Rodenberg.

Aye: Megan Albert, Thomas Buzzi, Timothy Klepps, Erik Perotti, Frank Rodenberg, Timothy Russell, Deirdre Tindall and Kristin Young
Naye: Penny Miller
Abstain:

(8-1-0)
Motion Passes

D. Adjournment

MOTION by Penny Miller to adjourn the meeting at 7:26PM. Second by Timothy Russell.

UNANIMOUS
Motion Passes

Respectfully submitted by,
Elizabeth Domas, Recording Secretary

Recorded Regular and Special Board of Education meetings will be posted to:
https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCX-_ZlomWmjG81dc_QM3rfg

Attachments: *(Filed with the Town Clerk and available upon request, or see links included if available)*
Letters to the BOE
(https://resources.finalsite.net/images/v1744114537/newhtfdorg/i64zbxhemp0upysvggtr/April8thLetters_5.pdf)