

Public Hearing
FY16 Proposed Budget
January 13, 2015

Attendees: Chairman, Richard Wallace, Ruthann Goguen, Superintendent, Earl Somero, Vice Chairman, Jeff Salmonson, Tara Sousa, Jim Kingston, David Jack, MRI Business Management Consultant, Melissa Vinal, Curriculum Coordinator, Janice Longgood, Director, Student Services, Marion Saari, Principal, HHES, Thomas Starratt, Principal, BMS, Thomas Kelly, Principal, MRHS, Gary Somero, Facilities Director, Matt Ballou, Information Technical Director, Various Community Members.

School Board Meeting Norms: Start/end on time, follow the agenda and avoid tangents, refrain from side conversations respect and hear from all voices and assume best intentions.

Call to Order 6:00 pm

Pledge of Allegiance

Chairman Wallace, Welcomed everyone to this meeting.

Chairman Wallace read off a list of Housekeeping items.

The Board did a powerpoint presentation of the FY16 proposed budget. When the presentation was over, Chairman Wallace turned the floor over to the audience for questions and answers. Chairman Wallace asked for people to stand and give their name and the town they live in.

The Board and the Administrators were introduced.

Wendy Freeman of New Ipswich commented that there was a pretty substantial increase in budget. She said that the townspeople need to evaluate where we are with our tax rate. She said that she took on the job of comparing the median of the towns around New Ipswich. She compared New Ipswich with towns 20% smaller and larger than us. She found the median to be \$13. We are at \$18. She would like to see us get down to \$14. We cannot afford to pay the taxes on these large budgets.

Joel Sikkala of New Ipswich discussed some of the problems that he saw with the budget. He discussed the Special Ed 2015 budget. He discussed the 2014 actual costs of Special Ed transportations, and many other line items. He discussed that the 2015 heating budget is 19% over the actual 2014 budget. He mentioned several other line items that he was watching in the budget. He had no actual question for the Board, but was just giving them information that he was able to see, that he thought should be looked at to make the budget smaller.

Mark Mansfield of New Ipswich spoke about the RSA's and how people should look into them and use them to their advantage. With regards to the contracts and increased salaries, he said that Superintendent Goguen signed a new contract and has gotten an increase. The Board explained that there is a package of money \$33,000 blocked into salary and benefits. At this point, it is not allocated.

Hans Ojala of New Ipswich wanted to know if the school was affected because of the taxes that were not paid by the homeowners who were not able to pay their taxes.

David Jack answered saying that the Towns pay the school their portion. There was no change in the payment. Nothing has changed at this point.

Wendy Freeman asked if she could answer that question. She said that the Towns are obligated to pay the SAU their money, and because of the unpaid taxes, the town suffers.

Brian Somero of New Ipswich commented that the townspeople put in 3 new board members last year and we hoped they would do the job that needs to be done at the school. How come the Board hasn't done a better job of taking care of the parents?

Chairman Wallace stated that he feels he has represented his community and done a good job. I support the Superintendent and Administrators. He feels that he has worked hard along with the other Board members and they are trying to do their best for both towns.

Vice Chairman Earl Somero stated that he was fully committed to this community. He has gone through all the schools, his children have gone through all of the schools and his grandchildren are now going through all the schools. I know a lot of people in this community and care about everything that is going on in this town. I care about kids and feel that it is important for us to take the responsibility to be able to educate and teach our kids and create a system where they learn and get the tools to have a successful life. My number 1 priority is to do what is best for kids. I am not saying everything is perfect, but we try hard. Revaluation that took place in New Ipswich and that had something to do with the taxes going up. I don't think the burden falls totally on us. We can't change things overnight. I believe that we have positions in place that need to be changed, but it is hard to talk about some things.

Tara Sousa, Board member from Greenville commented that she was on the Collective Bargaining Negotiations team for 4 years. When we approached the negotiating table, we saw that our teachers were making less than a lot of our neighboring communities. Most communities I looked at showed that our teachers were paid much less. We all worked very hard for a long time and when it came time, people voted for the negotiated salaries. We are now obligated to pay those salaries.

Elaine Nelson of New Ipswich wanted to know how many graduates went on to college.

Principal Kelly stated that it runs about 44% with about 10% going into the military. A couple of years ago it was required for student to fill out applications to attend MT Wachusett Community College. It then came out that 100% of our students would be attending college. That was not a valid statistic. I tell our students that if you go to go into an occupations that needs a degree, definitely apply to colleges, but trade schools should also be looked at. We tell students that they need to look at other options. Our job is to encourage the students to do the thing that is important to them.

Paul Termin of New Ipswich said that Toms point is well said. I have been in the big corporate business for many years. I would look for efficiency's. What I didn't see in the budget was what the efficiencies are. People are not making as much money at this point. We are way out of line with this budget.

Chairman Wallace commented that he was right, you didn't hear any of that. The first budget that we got was large and we asked our Administrators to come back with another budget. They came back with many items that they took out of their budgets, and a much smaller budget.

Evan Gannon of New Ipswich asked about the new Special Ed Directors position. My question is, why are we asking for a director's position when we have always operated under the coordinator position and it has worked well for us.

Ruthann Goguen said it was a great question. Director of student services is a big job. That person oversees Title 1 too. We no longer have a title 1 director. It is a very large job. We have to reach compliancy with the State. We are asking for that position in order to be compliant.

Wendy Freeman stated that she had made some comments earlier saying that we should be putting a budget forward that is less than the default budget. 1 million or 1.5 million that is less than the budget that that is being proposed. I would like to see the school board do that instead of us having to do that at the deliberative session. I think you should go back and at least cut 1 million from the default budget.

Brian Somero stated that he agreed with Wendy. I think they are doing cuts in other towns. Are we concerned enough about poor taxpayers? How high can the average home taxes get before I have a point.

Jeff Salmonson said that as a board it is a balancing act. We have people coming to our meetings saying they want more, but we don't see you people coming to say what you want. We need to figure out what will work best for the students.

Kim Sherridan of New Ipswich is a parent of a Kindergarten student. She is pro teacher and pro student. I couldn't figure out my tax bill, so I came here to find out what is going on. I am hearing the test scores and that bothers me. It is not a reflection on the teachers. We have really good teachers in this district. People came here just to hear about the bottom line. Getting the LGC credit was a good thing. Then there was the money that we were given that got taken away. We have to understand that Special Ed is a really big job. Let's do little things. If we need a gym for \$5000, I will donate my treadmill and I am sure there are many others here that would do the same. I would like to see some efficiency and to trim the fat such as the athletic fields and the equipment for the gym.

Chairman Wallace said that we did start looking at different things we could do. There is a willingness to look at those things and make changes if we can.

Julie Lampinin of New Ipswich asked If we are about the kids, why are we are cutting a guidance position?

Principal Kelly said that we always had a guidance director and a guidance counselor. The difference between them is that a guidance counselor is in the union.

Directors make more, but they work 225 as opposed to the 180 days that a counselor works. The Director is also a guidance counselor as well as the being the Director.

Jason Somero of New Ipswich said I was pretty active the last time there as a revolt about the taxes. I would like to encourage the board to look strongly at this budget and cut about 6%. Wendy was suggesting that you bring your budget down. We need about a 2 million dollar cut to have a slight decrease. If you guys could do this, you would win some awards. You would definitely win an award

from the townspeople if you could do this. I want to challenge the board to come in with a budget with a number so that I don't have to choke on my tax bill.

Caroline Cormier said that it is clear that we need a compromise. We need to make sure that the little bit of money that we have goes to the kids. One year we cut a position with a really good person and then we find that we need the position and get some unknown person that no one knows and we have a hard time with. We should take that into consideration.

Chairman Wallace thanked everyone for taking the time to come to this meeting. We still have a lot of work to do now. Please put any other questions you may have down on paper and email any member of the Board, and we will get back to you.

Meeting adjourned at 8:10.

Minutes Approved – January 20, 2015