



BUDGET COMMITTEE
Town of Hollis
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Minutes of January 26, 2011

Meeting was held in the Community Room, Hollis Town Hall. The Budget Committee was called to order by Chris Hyde, Chairman at 6:45 PM.

Members present: Chris Hyde, Chairman; Mike Harris, Tom Gehan, Ray Valle, Frank Whittemore, Tom Jambard, Peter Band

Also present: Bill Beauregard, Chairman-Hollis School Board, Rob Mann. Rosemary Mezzocchi, Rich Manley, Susan Hodgdon, Paul Calabria, Rich Raymond, Liz Allen, Candy Fowler, Amy Bottomley, Jeanne Saunders, Chris Siegfried
Mark LeDoux arrived at 7:20.

Chris Hyde mentioned the SAU 41 Disability Awareness Presentation on Thursday, Feb.3, 2011 from 6:30 to 8:30 pm at the Lawrence Barn. The public is invited and encouraged to attend. He also read a statement from Susan Benz, who was unable to be present tonight, which was a commendation to the school and SAU staff for all of their hard work in creating a lean budget which did not sacrifice the quality of education in Hollis.

School Budget Presentation: Bill Beauregard

Bill B. started off with a quick review of the handout, including the revenue offsets on the guidance formula page. The bottom line is that the proposed budget is under guidance by \$84K, with most of the savings coming from the Special Education program. Ray V. wanted to know what the effect on the budget would be if the Spec. Ed. costs were not included. The answer was that the savings would be \$170K. Mike H. expressed concern that if the Sp. Ed. budget is down significantly, it could be masking increases in other parts of the budget, and the whole could still be coming out under guidance. Paul C. pointed out that increases in line items for the number of ABA students, substitute teachers, computer upgrades, classroom teacher salaries, and network and software allocation does account for a majority of the differential. Bill B. offered to have a slide showing all the big budgetary changes, both increases and decreases, available for the public hearing. Also, a breakdown of the savings in Sp. Ed. due to students shifting from the Hollis district to the Coop.

A cost per student comparison was done between Hollis and Amherst, and the costs turned out to be almost identical. The same comparison is being performed with Brookline. This information will be available for the public hearing.

Bill B. next discussed the aging computer technology in the schools and the approach to keeping the systems current with the new software. The cost of this for FY12 would be \$65K. This covers approximately half of the computers in use, and includes the replacement of 130 CRTs with flat screen. It was suggested that software renewals should be budgeted on an annualized basis.

Bill B. then brought up the issues surrounding the water system and pump house, which provide water to the schools. A cost estimate has been included for a plan which maintains the equipment in the event of a power outage. The consensus was to do nothing for the time being, and the estimated cost was removed from the budget.

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The next discussion concerned the estimated tax rate calculation. It was not completely clear whether the numbers are accurate, so are not considered final at his time. The final figures will be available before the work session on Jan 31.

Contracts for transportation and the collective bargaining agreement will not be in place before the hearing, so adjustments for these items will be in a separate warrant article.

Public Input:

Steve Pucci questioned the student to teacher ratio today versus 2003, and was wondering why the ratio has dropped so dramatically. Also, why the cost per student in the Hollis district is \$2400 more than at the Coop. The board members agreed that it is a good question, that it has been under discussion for some time, and hopefully the comparison with other school districts may shed some light on the subject.

Tom Enright listed several towns from the state data which all came in with much lower cost per pupil. He then listed specific budget areas where the Hollis district budget was higher than the Coop, despite the fact that the Hollis district enrollment is less than half the enrollment of the Coop district. These numbers are way off-kilter and he requested that the BudComm take some action to rectify the situation. Tom J. requested that the board receive copies of Mr. Enrights data. Concerning the Sp. Ed. budget, Jeanne S. responded that the methodology in the two districts is very different, which can make the costs higher at the elementary level than at the secondary level. Early intervening services at the elementary level usually result in cost savings at secondary level. So you really can't compare the two. Peter B. wanted confirmation from the administrators that the proposed cuts in the Sp. Ed. budget would not in any way jeopardize our ability to satisfy our obligation to the students in the program. It was assured that that was not the case. Bill B. suggested comparing the actual service hours, rather than just FTE head count. John Anderson requested further detail on the numbers for the water system. He advised against spending too much time and money fine-tuning a system that has been working well as-is, for the school and town, for a very long time.

Committee Input:

Mike H. requested that the \$15K for the town's portion of the annual budget for the water system be placed in the town's budget rather than the school budget. He also asked how it was justified to eliminate one School Psychologist position. This was explained by Jeanne S.

Frank W. believes that the staffing levels for Sp. Ed. are excessive, but thanked the administrative staff for their helpful explanations.

Tom G. cautioned against comparing staffing ratios between the Coop and the Hollis district, as the needs at the various levels are different. He then expressed concern about overall trends for the past several years, where staffing levels have increased while enrollments have declined. The board requested a more detailed account of FTE positions, since it was known that some shared employees had been double counted.

Ray V. commented that unless the budget shows some decline to reflect the dropping enrollment, taxpayer frustration could result in a radical proposal from the floor at town meeting. He felt it is more likely to happen now more than ever and that the board should be prepared.

Chris H. reiterated the fact that the FTE numbers need to be checked for accuracy because they affect the board's ability to make fair judgments. He's not sure the budget numbers are where they need to be. Also, without the town hall repairs and HUES mold remediation in the budget, the sense is that the tax rate should be down from last year and he is not convinced that is going to be the case. It is time to start putting numbers together to get a better feeling for where the tax rate is trending.

Bill B. was commended for his incredible dedication and time spent preparing for these meetings; all present were in agreement.

Upcoming meetings:

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Monday January 31 – budget workshop @ Town Hall, 7:00 pm

Public hearings:

Monday February 7 – 6:30 pm @ Town Hall Town budget

Tuesday February 8 – 7:00 pm @ HBMS gym Coop budget

Wednesday February 9 – 6:30 pm @ Town Hall Hollis district budget

Motion to adjourn was made by Tom G. and seconded by Mike H. Meeting adjourned: 9:35 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Barbara Kowalski, Tax Collector