

BUDGET COMMITTEE

Minutes of March 22, 2005

Meeting was held in the Community Room, Hollis Town Hall and was called to order by Chairman, Mike Harris at 7:35 PM.

Members present: Mike Harris, Chairman; Scott Bartis, Vice Chairman; Melinda Willis, Selectmen's Representative; Anita Moynihan, School Board Representative; Christine Furman, Chris Hyde; Deborah Adams, Secretary

Also present: Harry Haytayan, School Board Member

Election of Officers

Scott nominates Mike Harris as Chairman. Seconded by Chris. Motion unanimously approved

Melinda nominates Scott Bartis as Vice-Chairman. Seconded by Chris. Motion unanimously approved.

Melinda nominates Chris Hyde as Clerk. Seconded by Christine. Motion approved 5-1-0 with Chris opposing.

Meeting Schedule

Mike asks all BudCom members if they would like to continue with the same schedule, meeting on the 4th Tuesday of each month at 7:30 pm.

Chris moves to continue meeting at the same time. Seconded by Christine. Motion unanimously approved.

Resignation and Appointment to BudCom

Mike reads a letter of resignation from Melinda Willis who has recently been elected as a Selectmen. Although she must step down as a member of the BudCom she has been appointed to be the Selectmen's rep on the Committee. He points out that both the School Board and the Selectmen are required to appoint a representative to the BudCom as well as an alternate. If the representative cannot attend the meeting, the alternate should attend. Both the School Board and Selectmen representatives have equal voting rights as the regular members.

Scott moves to accept Melinda's resignation with regret and understanding. Seconded by Chris. Motion unanimously approved.

Mike states that the BudCom has the authority to appoint a replacement for the remainder of the open term.

Melinda moves to nominate Lorin Rydstrom as a BudCom member for the remainder of the open term. Seconded by Scott. Motion unanimously approved.

School Report

Anita states that there is no official report. The School Board had a brief meeting while they were still in limbo (awaiting a recount of the ballot votes). There is still a possibility for the preschool program. So far they have received positive feedback. Harry stresses to the BudCom that the School Board has NOT taken a vote or made any definitive decisions on this program. At this time they are merely gathering information and public input. The School Board will be hosting a public forum to assist with the information gathering process. Anita states that they are proceeding with an application to the State for a license to be a preschool. If they apply for a 50/50 license, this can be amended if the ratio of Special Education to Typical Education students changes drastically. Mike comments that this ratio can easily change from year to year. He is not sure if this program will save the district any money, yet educationally and socially it will be a benefit to the children.

Mike states that his concerns regarding this program are the current and future space needs, staffing requirements, parental and public interest. Anita explains that they have performed an initial survey during the kindergarten enrollment. They are starting another survey to all families within the school. Harry explains that there are 2 levels; the current 3 year olds that have already been identified and the 2 year olds that are unknown to the school at this time, yet will be moving up into the program. The information that they have obtained so far indicates that Hollis will have the ability to handle this program in-house.

Mike adds that the biggest issue the BudCom has is that this is a new program and therefore it should be voted upon separately during the annual meeting, although the School Board disagrees with this. Anita stresses that they have requested the public forum to be scheduled ASAP. This may be held as soon as April. Mike indicates that he would like to have a BudCom member serve as a liaison to follow the process. He suggests Scott would be a good choice, as he has much experience with Special Education with his job. Scott agrees to act as the liaison. Harry points out that the School Board does not wish to have the same problems as another school district in the area has encountered with a recent decision. He would like to see the School Board having a very open dialogue with the public.

Town Report

Melinda indicates that she has nothing to report at this time.

Town Meeting Analysis

Melinda comments that the BudCom said "yes" to more in this year's budgets than in previous years, yet no more was actually passed. In the past the School has consistently come in well over the BudCom's guidelines. This year the BudCom agreed to more in the budget and the School met this level. Scott states that the BudCom was more complicated in their recommendations this year. Melinda states that the guidelines used to be an increase based on just the CPI, then there were a few years that some items were removed, such as debt and food service. For the past 2 years the School Board has argued that they cannot meet the BudCom's recommendations with the negotiated settlements included. The BudCom allowed the obligated or mandated items to increase above the CPI. Anita agrees that if they are held to just the CPI, there is not enough to cover both Regular and Special Education. Regular Education would suffer. She stresses that they cannot cut from either program. Harry comments that he would like to have the BudCom involved in the negotiation process to help them look at items objectively.

Mike comments that he thought the Special Education program was holding steady, yet actually this has been steadily rising. He feels this is more to do with administration than demographics. Scott states that people want to move into Hollis for the Special Education program. Melinda comments that pulling the Special Education funds out before budgeting, then adding it back in at the end will lose any oversight of this aspect of the budget. She is concerned that this will happen. Harry agrees that some things have been irresponsible, yet changes are coming to the administration this next year. He is hoping this will help to turn things around.

Mike points out that there will be a major change in state funding coming up very soon that will negatively impact the tax rate. Harry agrees. Mike states that they also need to keep teacher salaries competitive. Chris takes exception to this attitude. He stresses that there is no performance mechanism with that kind of philosophy. If they continually increase teacher's salaries to stay competitive, they are not forcing the teachers to perform at their highest level. There is no quality control with performance raises. They need to keep and reward the good teachers.

Chris comments that he would like to coordinate with Brookline to have some oversight on the SAU budget next year. He points out that apportionment will be coming up again in 2 years.

Other Business

Melinda states that she likes the concept of using the Yahoo email group, yet it does not seem to be working properly. Mike comments that they are restrained by law to not deliberate when they are not in public. Melinda reads from a recent article published in the New Hampshire Town & City magazine, sent out to Town employees from the Local Government Center, regarding the Right to Know Law. The question was raised, "What is a meeting?". According to this article a meeting is defined as "the convening of a quorum of the membership of a public body ...", this is further explained as "whether in person, by means of telephone or electronic equipment, or in any other manner, such that all participating members are able to communicate with each other contemporaneously". Therefore, "a telephone conference call obviously would be a meeting if a quorum of the public body is participating. In contrast, an e-mail exchange among a quorum of the public body would *not* be a meeting, because members are not all able to communicate with each other contemporaneously. They may be able to send messages back and forth very quickly, but the communication is not contemporaneous". Melinda adds that although email is fast, it only goes one way, which is no different from standard mail.

Mike states that the issue wasn't really about whether or not this was legal; he was more concerned that deliberation was not being done via email, as this must be done in public session.

Melinda moves to adjourn. Seconded by Anita. Motion unanimously approved.

Next Meeting will be held April 26, 2005 at 7:30 PM in the Town Hall Community Room

Meeting adjourned at 8:50 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Deborah Adams, Secretary