

Town of Farmington  
Budget Committee Meeting Minutes  
Thursday, January 11, 2018

**Committee Members Present:**

Sylvia Arcouette, Chairman  
Jodi Connolly, Vice Chairman  
Elizabeth Johnson, Secretary  
Neil Johnson, Selectmen's Rep.  
Angie Cardinal, School Board Rep.  
Stephen Henry  
Michelle Elbert  
Jason Lauze  
Sam Cataldo  
Tim Brown

**Committee Members Absent:**

Heidi Mitchell, excused

**Others Present:**

SAU Superintendent Ruth Ellen Vaughn  
Laurie Verville, Business Administrator  
Debbie Pate, FESPU President  
Diana Denitto, Dir. Student Services  
Bonnie Telles, Bus Coordinator  
Larry Gordon, Facilities Director

**1). Call to Order:**

Chairman Arcouette reconvened the meeting at 6 p.m.

**2). Pledge of Allegiance:**

All present stood for the Pledge of Allegiance.

**3). Public Hearing on School District Budget and Warrant Articles (Continued):**

**Article 4- Para professionals' Proposed Contract-**

Chairman Arcouette read the article aloud and called for a motion.

**Motion:** (Henry, second Cardinal) to recommend Article 4;

**Discussion:** Mr. Henry asked how this differs from the last contract.

Mrs. Vaughn said there are wage changes, language changes to longevity, the health insurance has been changed to 80% paid by the district from 70% paid by the district and their health plan was changed to the same "Yellow Plan" the rest of the district is on.

Ms. Connolly asked how much more the health coverage is costing the district.

Ms. Verville said it is more of a savings as the employee contributes more to some features in the Yellow Plan and there are now more participants in the plan so the premiums are less.

Mr. Brown asked which employee groups are members of the Farmington Education Support Professionals United.

Mrs. Vaughn said the group only includes the district's Paraprofessionals.

Mr. Brown asked for the low to high salary range for the Para's.

Mrs. Vaughn said the current top salary is \$17.95 and if the contract is approved the top step next year would be \$18.05.

Mr. Brown asked if this would make the district competitive with other districts.

Mrs. Vaughn said it's fairly close to what other districts do but this district does not offer a differential for one-on-one Para's as some other districts do.

Mr. Henry said that a previous meeting, Mrs. Vaughn spoke about a student who came back in district because there was a Para available with the specific skills needed for that student. He asked if the new agreement allows the district to attract or retain Para's with specific skills to keep students in district instead of sending them out of district for their needs.

Mrs. Vaughn said there is no specific contract language in that regard but she does have the ability to make additional training available for the current staff. There is no wage differential for them if we do that she said.

Mr. Henry said that a trained Para is not only more valuable to this district, but becomes valuable to other districts as well. He asked if management got any tool in the contract to attract or retain Para's with such skills.

Mrs. Vaughn said she was not at liberty to discuss what happened during contract negotiations. She said there is not that tool included in this contract.

Mr. Brown asked if there was union rep. present that wished to speak in favor of the contract. Union President Debbie Pate said the raise for Para's on the top step is 10 cents an hour per year for the next 3 years and that they tried to keep the contract from being a hardship on the community. She said the Para's said they didn't want a big increase and just wanted their time back to work with the children. She added that the health insurance that was 60% district paid/40% employee paid would go to 80%/20%.

Mr. Brown said there has been discussion that it is hard to recruit and retain Para's and asked Ms. Pate if she was happy with the contract as negotiated and if it goes far enough.

Ms. Pate said that she is personally very happy with the contract as their main goal is to have their time in the schools working with the students. She said there is shortage of Para's everywhere and the students they work with need the extra help.

Mr. Henry asked if the contract guaranteed any minimum number of hours.

Mrs. Vaughn said the minimum is 30 hours for a full time Para and the regular day is 32.5 hours.

Ms. Pate said there was no guarantee that they were going to get back 32.5 hours and they understood that when they negotiated and voted on this contract.

Ms. Connolly pointed out there is a definition in the contract which states that the number of hours per day for full time Para's will not go below 7.2 hours .

Mrs., Vaughn said the definitions are new to this contract and it also includes the definition of a part time or part day Para. She said there may be students who are only enrolled for part of the day due to a physical need and this gives her the ability to hire someone as a one-on-one for that student or to hire a retired person who wants to work a set number of hours.

Diana Denitto said the student who was brought back into the district was not an out of district placement but was receiving contracted services in the school district. We were able to eliminate that contracted service and provide it in house she said.

Mr. Johnson said that he would be voting against the contract because he hadn't read it as he had just received it that day.

**Vote:** The motion failed 4-5-1. (Arcouette abstained).

Chairman Arcouette said that as Chair, she would not be voting on any motions except in the case of a tie vote.

**Article 5- Conduct Special Meeting if Article #4 is defeated-**

Mr. Johnson said this article does not need to be addressed by the Budget Committee.

Mr. Lauze said if the Chairman did not vote there would only be 9 members voting and asked how that could end up as a tie vote.

Ms. Arcouette said if another member abstained from voting there could be a tie vote.

**Article 6- Lease/Purchase Two School Buses-** (\$170,193 for a 4 year lease for 2 buses, \$42,548 first year payment)-

**Motion:** (N. Johnson, second Connolly) to recommend Article 6;

**Discussion:** Ms. Connolly asked when the last time the district got new buses was.

Ms. Verville said the last time was in 2014.

Ms. Connolly asked how many buses were purchased at that time.

Ms. Verville said 2 buses were purchased then and they have been paid off.

Ms. Connolly asked about the length of the lease for the new buses.

Ms. Verville said it would be a 4 lease for purchase so the district will own the buses at the end of the 4 year period.

Mr. Johnson asked if this type of financing is usually listed as lease-to-purchase.

Mrs. Vaughn said the title of the article states "Lease/Purchase".

Ms. Connolly asked if the 2 buses being replaced would be sold.

Ms. Verville said that would be up to the School Board but they could be put them out to bid or they could get an appraisal and see if there would be any kind of trade allowance with the new buses.

Mr. Johnson asked if there has been any discussion about whether they would keep or sell the old buses.

Ms. Verville said the board has not held this discussion yet.

Ms. Connolly asked how many miles are on the 2 buses being replaced.

Bonnie Telles said it is not a matter of miles but that the old buses are rusting away. These two buses are the ones that have run the dirt roads, are outside every day and have about 100,000 miles each. It's not because the engines go but because the body rusts away she said.

Ms. Connolly asked what the year the buses were manufactured.

Ms. Telles said both buses are 2006 models. She said they should just get rid of the old buses and to not keep putting money into them as there will be enough buses if we get 2 new buses.

Mr. Brown asked if there is a replacement plan for the buses or if they are replaced as needed.

Mrs. Vaughn said up until now it has been on an as needed basis but with the leasing it gives

the district a better opportunity to develop a replacement cycle.

Mr. Brown asked about the state law requiring transporting students to school.

Ms. Verville said state law is 2 miles but the district policy is to transport students who live 1 ½ miles or more from school.

Mr. Brown asked if there is room on the buses to offer a fee based ride service to some students who walk to school. He said if there were 25 walkers who paid \$25 a week that is almost enough money to fund a lease payment and the \$42,000 could be used elsewhere in the budget. If there were more walkers interested in using the ride service than there is room on the buses the users could be chosen by lottery he said.

Ms. Telles said she made this suggestion a few years ago and it was voted down by the School Board. She said that by law they do not have to transport high school students and there are towns where it is “pay to ride” for those students. She advised that one big development in town could fill the entire bus and asked how you decide who gets to ride and who does not.

Mr. Brown said by lottery as the Rec. Dept. does as they can only service so many kids. He said he is not looking to take away from high school students but was looking at students walking to school during the recent bitter cold temperatures.

Ms. Telles said she will stop and pick up any student walking in the extremely cold weather.

Mr. Henry said the article says that the general operating budget will be reduced by \$17,000 that is budgeted for repair of the old buses and asked why they did not just reduce the amount of the first year lease payment by that amount.

Ms. Verville said because of full disclosure laws they have to report and let voters know what the expense is going to be for that payment and that if it passes that there will be some savings elsewhere.

Mr. Johnson asked if the savings will be applied to the first year payment if the article is approved.

Ms. Verville said that is correct.

Mrs. Vaughn said \$20,000 is budgeted for bus repairs and they plan to retain \$3,000 for the yearly regular bus maintenance required. The additional repairs (\$17,000) needed for the old buses would not be needed for 2 brand new buses she said.

Mr. Henry asked if you can change one warrant article with another warrant article.

Mrs. Vaughn said that Article 6 is written in way to disclose the additional savings which would be put toward the lease. They have to say what the entire amount of the lease payment is because next year the repairs would not be budgeted and the lease payment amount would be the same each year for the next 3 years she said.

Mr. Henry asked if the amount to be raised by taxation in Article 4 would reduce the amount to be raised by taxation in Article 3.

Mrs. Vaughn said the estimated tax impact of 5 cents for Article 6 includes the \$17,000 reduction.

Mr. Henry said he did not favor seeing bus leases every so many years and would rather see a warrant article for a Capital Reserve Fund (CRF) to level out the yearly expenditures.

Mrs. Vaughn clarified that the payment is not \$171,000 for this year but is \$42,000 for this year and \$42,000 each year for each of the following 3 years.

Mr. Henry said he would rather see level funding to a CRF where some years we don't spend from it and some years we spend from it when needed.

Mr. Johnson said that is something for the School Board to decide.

Mrs. Vaughn said they could also decide that when there is a year with no lease payment the money that would have gone a payment could go into a CRF.

**Vote:** The motion passed 9-0-1 (Arcouette abstained).

**Article 7- Replacement of School Van (\$30,000 from the School Bus CRF)-**

**Motion:** (Henry, second Connolly) to recommend Article 7;

**Discussion:** Ms. Connolly asked when was the last time the school district bought a van and how many vans the district currently owns.

Mrs. Vaughn said this van was purchased in 2007.

Ms. Telles said the district currently owns 3 vans.

**Vote:** 9-0-1 (Arcouette abstained).

**Article 8- Resurface Tennis Courts (\$4,000 from the Outdoor Athletic Facilities CRF) -**

**Motion:** (Henry, second Connolly) to recommend Article 8;

**Discussion:** Ms. Arcouette asked for the total amount currently in the CRF.

Mr. Johnson said there is approx. \$14,800 in the fund.

Mrs. Cardinal said area residents have raised safety concerns about the condition of the court.

Mr. Henry asked if there are any school classes using the court now.

Mrs. Vaughn said there are no classes using the court now.

**Vote:** The motion passed 9-0-1 (Arcouette abstained).

**Article 9- Remove and Replace Roof A and A1 at the Henry Wilson School (\$55,000 from the Buildings and Grounds CRF) -**

**Motion:** (Henry, second N. Johnson) to recommend Article 9;

**Discussion:** Mr. Henry asked for the location of Roofs A and A1.

Larry Gordon said they are the roofs for the building additions that were installed in 1968. He said this section of the building was previously used for the music and art rooms and are now being used as classrooms.

Mr. Johnson asked if these roofs have ever been replaced before.

Mr. Gordon said they have never been replaced and there are no records of any repairs done to the roofs. He said they the only remaining ballast roofs on the building and they will be replaced with membrane roofing. He added they also have a long range plan projected out through 2025 to replace different sections of the roofs.

**Vote:** The motion passed 9-0-1 (Arcouette abstained).

**Article 10- Remove and Replace FHS Roofs A, B & D (\$550,000 from the FHS Construction, Renovation and Repair Fund) -**

**Motion:** (Connolly, second Henry) to recommend Article 10;

Ms. Connolly asked if there is a Roof "C".

Mrs. Vaughn said there is a "C" and an "E" roof and that roofs A, B & D are the ones that need to be repaired first.

Ms. Connolly asked if these are the original roofs and what year they were installed.

Mr. Gordon said they are the original roofs that were installed in 1995.

Mr. Henry asked if the roof replacement plan is available so they would know "what's coming down the pike" and how much is in the CRF.

Mrs. Vaughn said the CRF has \$737,548 in it now. This was part of the CRF plan that was presented to the town last year with the roof sections needing work and the reserve funds that would be used to fund the costs she said.

Mr. Johnson asked if there is an actual estimate for the work or if this is a "ballpark" figure.

Mr. Gordon said the roofing company he has been working with has estimated the work at \$20 to \$25 a square foot. The roofing company subcontracts the work and oversees the project. All of the new roofs will have a 30 year warranty once completed and can be resurfaced in the future if needed he said.

Mr. Brown said he did not have a problem with the warrant article itself but the district is facing some pretty significant repairs in the future and asked if the CRF's would be able to sustain the increased costs.

Mrs. Vaughn said portions of the work will be funded by the CRF's and other portions may be absorbed by the proposed performance contract.

**Vote:** The motion passed 9-0-1 (Arcouette abstained).

**Article 11: Establish Kitchen Equipment CRF- (\$7,500 from the unexpended fund balance on July 1) -**

**Motion:** (Henry, second Connolly) to recommend Article 11;

**Discussion:** Ms. Connolly asked about the June 30<sup>th</sup> fund balance.

Mrs. Vaughn said these are the unexpended funds at the end of the year or the "leftovers".

Ms. Connolly asked what would happen if there were no leftovers this year.

Mrs. Vaughn said if there were no leftovers the article would not be funded. She said the article seeks to name the School Board as agents to expend the funds instead bringing it back as another warrant article. This allows them to apply for 50/50 matching grants available from the state and equipment could be bought for half its cost with the grant she said.

Mr. Johnson asked if the funds were intended for cafeteria equipment.

Mrs. Vaughn the funds would be used for the cafeteria and not for the Family Consumer Science classes.

**Vote:** The motion passed 9-0-1 (Arcouette abstained).

**Articles 12 & 13-** There are no financial aspects to Articles 12 (appoint the School Board as agents to expend from the Bus CRF) and 13 (appoint the School Board as agents to expend from the Outdoor Athletic Facilities CRF) so no action was taken by the committee on these articles.

**Article 3- School District Operating Budget (\$16,429,397 recommended by the School Board, \$16,154,830 recommended by the Bud Com)-**

Mr. Johnson said all the committee had left to address was to vote on Article 3.

Members said they did vote on Article 3 (0-7-2 not to recommend with 2 abstentions).

Mr. Henry said the committee did not restrict consideration of the vote on Article 3.

Mrs. Cardinal said there will be an opportunity for the committee to recommend or not recommend articles after the Deliberative Session and before the ballot is printed.

Mr. Johnson said Article 3 has to be changed for the Deliberative Session to reflect the new budget number voted by the committee.

Mr. Henry asked if the committee wanted to allow themselves the ability to reconvene on recommendations after the Deliberative Session as some numbers may change.

Mr. Johnson said there is Bud Com meeting posted for Feb. 3. He said they typically convene the meeting at 8:50 a.m. then recess until after the Deliberative Session and if anything changes they will resubmit their vote to recommend or not recommend any articles.

Mr. Brown asked if the deadline for petitioned warrant articles has expired and if any petitioned articles had been received.

Mrs. Vaughn said the deadline expired on Tues. Jan. 9 and that one petitioned warrant article had been received and will be placed on the warrant as written as is required.

Mr. Brown asked if there was any financial aspect to the article.

Mrs. Vaughn said she wasn't sure but the Bud Com does not vote to recommend or not recommend petitioned warrant articles. The required 25 signatures have been certified by the Town Clerk and then the article goes forward to the Deliberative Session as written she said.

Mr. Johnson said the petitioned warrant article can be changed at the Deliberative Session.

**Adjournment:**

**Motion:** (N. Johnson, second Connolly) to adjourn the meeting passed unanimously at 6:50 p.m.

Respectively submitted

Kathleen Magoon

Recording Secretary

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Sylvia Arcouette, Chairman

