

Town of Farmington
Budget Committee Meeting Minutes
Wednesday, November 29, 2023
356 Main Street-Farmington, NH 03835

Committee Members Present:

Joe Pitre, Chairman
John Deering, Vice Chairman
Doug Staples, Selectmen's Rep
Jess Parker, School Board Rep
Jenn Haskell
Angie Cardinal
Heidi Mitchell
Bob Morgan

Others Present:

Ken Dickie, Town Administrator
Kelly Heon, Finance Administrator
Jim Doig, Superintendent designee
Mackenzie Campbell, Business Admin
Mary Barron, School Board member

1). Call to Order:

Chairman Pitre called the meeting to order at 7 p.m.

2). Pledge of Allegiance:

All present stood for the Pledge of Allegiance.

3). Public Input:

Mr. Pitre said there were members of the public present and recognized the SAU Superintendent designee and the Business Admin. He asked if the Superintendent would like to say a few words to the committee.

Jim Doig came forward and said he is currently the Superintendent designee which means he is sort of in between until his predecessor's situation gets straightened out. He said he is happy to be here and as he was saying to the Chair prior to the meeting he is not a ladder climber he is hoping to be permanent and stay the course for a while because if nothing else the school district could use some stability at least at the top.

He said he is hoping they will be pleased with the budget that is going to be presented and he tried as his colleagues do to be cognizant of the tax rate and he thinks they are going to bring them some good news. He said their consideration and input is something that they welcome. He said he has been married 34 years and has been in the business for 33 years. He said he has worked the public and private side and has done everything from kindergarten to college and before that he was a legal asst. for JC Penny in New York City. He said before that he was in the media business and he started at a small radio station and worked his way up to WABC in NY. I'm very happy to be here and very happy and privileged to be supporting your children and I'm hoping things will go really well all things considered as we move forward. I'm happy to answer any questions and I'm also pleased to have our Business Admin with us tonight he said.

Mr. Doig said the school district in a nutshell he couldn't speak to the issues prior to his arrival and he arrived in late August. He said he wanted to compliment all of the families and the students who attend our schools as well as everyone especially the School Board who helped take the reins and fill the district with staff and administrators who hit the ground running. He said they were able to get the schools open on time but they were still doing a little bit of cleanup from things that occurred in the past. He said he was not here to point fingers or lay blame at anyone's doorstep that's not a positive use of anyone's time especially theirs but they are making some positive strides without putting a burden on the taxpayer.

He said one example is if they have been in any of their buildings and had some trouble with the lighting they are about to replace all of the lighting throughout the district in a budget neutral way that will not impact the tax rate and it will do wonders as a sign of positive change and growth for our schools.

He said he was happy to say almost 50% of the students across the district are at a proficiency level in math and almost in English language arts. He said COVID impacts kids in a lot of ways and the country as a whole is still recovering from that but he was happy to say that what our school district has done has helped especially in the English language arts area for the kids to maintain a pretty good level of proficiency and they will have some numbers to back that up. We'll continue that trend going forward and being cognizant of the tax rate and the people who serve this community that are trying to do things in ways that will help he said.

He cited the lighting work as an example and said it is slated to begin a week from Friday and it will be done without interfering with the school day or the children's learning and it will also be done in such a way that the facilities will see very little impact in terms of items taken out and needing to be moved because the company they are working with is very cognizant of leaving things as they are when they show up to do their work. He invited the members to come to the schools any time that they'd like and they will show them the lay of the land.

4). Review of Minutes:

October 31, 2023- Public Meeting Minutes- no errors or omissions

Motion: (Parker, second Mitchell) to approve the minutes as written passed 6-0-2 (Haskell, Cardinal abstained).

5). Review of Board of Selectmen's Budget:

Town Administrator Ken Dickie said as they closed through Oct. and they still have some bills that haven't come in yet they are sitting at around 30% of the budget left. He said in the last couple months they have made some headway on the Highway Dept. as they hired another gentleman to bring their crew up to 5 and there is another one that is possibly going to be filing his application electronically and if he does they will interview him as soon as they can and get him on the books if he passes the interview and everything that goes with it. He said hopefully the Highway Dept. will soon be sitting at 6 people with Ed (Supervisor Ed Brannan) which would

be nice to get all the trucks occupied plowing snow and during the summer months to help get some of these things done. He said with that they would no longer have that cushion for the budget but it's a good thing to get things done in town.

Mr. Pitre asked if they hire contractors for snow at all.

Mr. Dickie said they haven't had to they utilized the Water and Sewer Dept. and their portion gets charged to the Town's side of it so it's not going to be covered by the rate payers to plow snow. He said they put them in ton trucks and anything they can run that doesn't require a CDL. He said they have a part timer who helps us throughout the seasons and he has a CDL so he occupies the 6 wheeler and he has a plow route. He has experience plowing in Alton with plowing for the state so he is an asset to have for a part timer he said.

Mr. Pitre asked what their fleet looked like and how many one ton, 6 wheelers, etc. they have.

Mr. Dickie said they have 1 one ton with a plow that's directly with the Town, they have one 5500, they have three 6 wheelers and two 10 wheelers. He said the Water/Sewer Dept. also has a ton truck that they utilize where they split the cost for that with the Town and the Water and Sewer so they are able to utilize it in times of emergency or snow.

Mr. Morgan said he thought the bridge on Hornetown Road was going to be swapped at the River Rd. this year and asked if that is next year.

Mr. Dickie said it went out to bid and they had 5 or 6 contractors that were interested and when they met with them they let them know it was going to be designed and built by the contractor it would not a design by an engineering firm that the Town would hire and then they would just make it. He said the intent was if they were going to design and build it utilizing their own engineering firm in hopes they could cut out time and get it completed and when they had the pre-bid meeting there were 3 bridge contractors there and 1 of them said they could do it and they would be under budget.

He said he was the only one and it was T Buck from Turner, Maine and they are a known bridge contractor in Maine and they have done some work in NH where they have built bridges in Wolfeboro, Rochester and other surrounding communities. He said the engineering firm representing the Town said he had no issues with awarding that to T Buck. They came in at \$1.549 million which is under the \$1.6 million which is good because we have the engineering portion that we need to cover that's covering the Town he said.

Mr. Dickie said he talked to NH DES which is a major portion of getting this work done trying to get a permit because the permitting can take up to 6 months. He said he let them know this is coming as well as other projects that are going to be coming next year such as culverts. He said in that conversation they gave him some valid points so he then called T Buck to let them know if they can work with another firm that the DES is familiar with it might help them get this through quicker so they took that point and he was going to contact some engineering firms to help his firm in hopes to get that done. He said if they can get their permits by June then they will start work in June. He said first they would probably tear down the River Road Bridge not

knowing when this permit is going to come through so at least they'll get that part done. He said they will take out the Hornetown Rd. Bridge once they have that permit they will not take it out until they have that because they want to keep that road open but as soon as they know they have the "green light" from the DES providing that it's early enough in the year they will take the bridge out and relocate it at River Rd. and then start working on the Hornetown Rd. Bridge. He said they gave us a schedule that they are committed to meeting and it was to start in June and be opened on Oct. 16, 2024.

Mr. Dickie said after the bid was closed down they committed to the Town that if this project was pushed out for reasons beyond our control that they would honor and stand by the price they gave us whether the bridge was built in 2024 or 2025 and they provided that to him in writing.

Mr. Morgan asked if that price includes putting the bridge in on River Rd.

Mr. Dickie said yes.

Mrs. Cardinal said when they are preparing next year's budget she noticed that the legal expenses line is over expended by 6% so with 2 months remaining in fiscal year it's closer to \$90,000 expended and asked if there are any plans in terms of keeping legal service needs low or somehow keeping the costs lower next year or do they plan on increasing that line for next year.

Mr. Dickie said they've had a lot of problems on Code Enforcement so those charges go directly to this line and a lot of it is pending litigation in courts and you can't replenish it until you get the court decision and they've had multiple court cases they had to attend and try to get things fixed because they're against our codes. He said so even though he planned for \$85,000 over the course of the year it continues to grow and get over expended. He said if they were to look at the amount of time the inspector spends on inspections vs. code violations half his year is on code enforcement issues because there are a lot of them here in this town.

Mrs. Cardinal asked if those are graduating to needing court time.

Mr. Dickie said they have had 3 of them gravitate up to court but you're paying for all the preparations, you're paying for the courtrooms themselves and when you start talking about what they're charging per hour it doesn't take long to eat that up.

Mrs. Heon said if they would like more transparency next year she can separate those legal costs instead of just having the legal line that encompasses everything she could have a separate line for Code Enforcement and for other matters so it might be helpful just to see where that money is being spent.

Mr. Dickie said the other piece of that is the Bradshere property purchasing where they purchased the property for the well to protect the well. He said they had to pay legal to do the deed research, to help go through all the paperwork to make sure everything was in place so that when they signed it there was no hiccup so those things are unanticipated as the year goes and drives the costs.

Mrs. Heon said some of them are reimbursed for example closing costs for property that they sell they are reimbursed for those costs they just don't decrease the expenditure it shows up on the revenue side. She said she detail that out a little better next year so it's explained better.

Mrs. Cardinal said that would be great and thanked her.

Mr. Dickie said he wanted to let the committee know that the Selectmen met tonight and set the tax rate. He said the school was able to get things completed and submitted to the DRA and then read aloud the tax rates as follows: Town: \$8.04 (\$1.17 increase); County: \$2.95 (31 cents increase); local education: \$12.76 (51 cents decrease); state education: \$1.91 (51 cents increase) for a total tax rate of \$25.66 (\$1.48 increase).

Mr. Morgan asked if there was any way under the Police Dept. budget to separate the Dispatch center from the Prosecution.

Mrs. Heon said yes but off the top of her head she didn't know what the breakdown is and then asked if he would like to see 2 lines.

Mr. Morgan said yes please.

Mr. Pitre asked if they wanted to explain how great the Strafford County Dispatch is for the town for people that don't know. He said it is quite a resource and it saves at least 1 or 2 officers so they can be doing other things and it has worked out well over the years. He said that is something a lot of people don't realize and they just upgraded the dispatch center so the coverage is supposedly quite a bit better.

Mr. Dickie said he knew they were working on it but he didn't know how far into it they are but it is better than what it was.

Mr. Pitre said they only got a politician's point of view.

Mr. Staples said they told them what they wanted to hear especially with the scanner. The service sucks he said.

6). Review of the School Board's Budget:

Mr. Campbell said they have a couple of items tonight and they sent the reports so they can go through those. He said he had a couple of financial updates and he has a budget proposal that includes the default portion as well. He said the default is still being reviewed by legal as well so they need their sign-off on what can remain in the default and he would pass that out when he is done.

He moved to Fund 10 and said the year-to-date spent is \$4,021,069 and they have encumbered \$6,940,522 leaving us with an end of year projected balance at this time of \$5,154,213 so there is roughly 31% of the budget remaining.

He said through Oct. 31 they spent \$1,364,913 and they successfully reconciled the bank accounts through Oct. He said when he came on board the average daily balance in their bank accounts was \$200,000 to \$300,000 which is about enough to cover one payroll. It is no longer the case we're averaging between \$1.5 and \$2 million so there's a big difference there. The majority of that is due to grant reimbursements that we were able to recover from last year

coming in now so the balance has been restored and we were able to close our books and complete the DOE 25, the MS-25 and allow the Town to set the tax rate today he said.

Mr. Campbell said they have the Revenue Report as well and in Oct. they collected \$2,303,510 in revenue from various sources. He said they had 8 federal grants close on 09/30/23 those grants were successfully reconciled and reported through the end of their life and closed out and they were able to recover a fair amount of funding from that although with ESSER II they did return a fair portion around \$250,000 to the feds. He said they hope to have another round of funding an offshoot from ESSER and at some point in the future they will release some extra grants off of the original ESSER and CARES grants and they are hoping they will do that again and Farmington will qualify for that money.

Mr. Pitre asked if they have a grant writer now.

Mr. Campbell said they do not have a grant writer but they've had to change their approach. He said they have a team of people working on grants and they're having weekly meetings. He said their priority is ESSER III and making sure they're budgeting the remainder of the money successfully. We're working with the community and the School Board to accomplish that as well as with the admin in our buildings where the focus is on education, keeping the facilities running and taking on some projects to make sure that the money being used does the opposite of setting us up for a fiscal cliff so that way the property has been maintained into the future so we're not constantly coming back and asking for new maintenance and facilities big budget items he said.

He said with a particular eye on recovering from the pandemic through learning loss education and facilities management we're hopeful that that money will be better spent and hopefully closer down to the penny. He said they still have 2 IDEA grants open and they were able to squeeze in a pre-engineering grant and they spent that full grant in the month of Sept. He said the teachers apply for these little grants and they take the money and budget it out themselves and they let the kids do the work or gain some sort of achievement from that and that's special for the kids and enhances their learning.

Mr. Campbell said 99% of their Title I grant for this year has been budgeted out and Title II and Title IV are progressing and those have more stipulations on what you can spend the money on. He said IDEA has been budgeted to the full allocation to the penny and they are transitioning some costs from the Title II or Title IV grant into a special grant called ARP Homeless Children and Youth which will enable us to pay for some of the costs for underprivileged individuals, families and children including transportation and other homeless needs. That is a better use of that money which will allow us to reallocate from our other grants to more educational and staff related programs he said.

He said they did a lot of work in between the last time they met but he was sure they had questions and concerns and opened it up to the board.

Mr. Pitre asked about the audit report and the \$4 million and if they have reconciled all those

problems with the previous review.

Mr. Campbell said a particular audit finding that was concerning was the student activities. He said the student activities had what they thought was missing money and the money has been found and reconciled and returned to the proper locations and those bank accounts have been reconciled through Oct. He said he retrained the staff on managing those accounts in a timely manner because it was such a big red flag on the audit.

He said moving to the larger sum of money he thinks the auditors were slightly confused as was everyone looking at our financials and it was more of a question of \$2 million and that is what he remembers. He said that is coinciding with our cash flow and when he came in the average balance in their account was not very high and that's because they were extending money on grant expenditures and they were not reporting back to the feds to receive our revenue reimbursement and so it drained the bank account. I don't know that the audit revealed the cash flow issue they just had noticed that it had been un-reconciled he said.

Mr. Campbell said he didn't think everything that they pointed out on the audit has been completely accounted for by hand but they've captured the vast majority of it through the work of financial consultants, our auditor and himself. He said Pam Reynolds is a local citizen and someone who is very savvy in accounting and offered us some free work time, she came in over the summer and helped him by doing a lot of work in tying out the fund and was able to find a lot of that money. She wasn't able to trace everything back to a source document or a reason for why it was there and that is more a red flag because they're indicating that our process is not fully accounting for what's being done he said.

He said not that it's missing but it's more of an accounting procedural error in that we need to properly account for these. He said a lot of these monies were winding up in these lines like an extra unassigned fund balance line there was an extra encumbrance line that they were carrying on their balance sheet and that added up close to \$1 million so they were able to take that money and put it back in the fund balance for this year and return that to the town and the board only chose to retain what they needed for a project that they had already decided on the previous year.

He said he hasn't finished this year's audit which he hopes will reveal the remainder of the problems but they have sent everything they need to progress with the audit. We're waiting to hear back for their next on-site visit for that he said.

Mrs. Haskell asked if that was a process that didn't exist issue or a process that wasn't being followed issue.

Mr. Campbell said it's a combination of both and one of the issues they found was accruals. He said the system was accruing money and they didn't know why so they put the money back in the budget. He said it's not that the money left although they were blowing money out the window and not taking it back from the grant the money was being miss-accounted to the wrong spot.

Mr. Deering asked if there is a way of making sure that that doesn't happen again in the future. Mr. Campbell said it has been rectified and they are not doing random accruals and if they run into a problem they consult the auditor ahead of time and he and Ms. Reynolds have committed to that when she returns from Las Vegas they will do a clean sweep of every procedure and ensure that the staff is trained to that procedure directly.

Mr. Doig said in the process of grant writing you've got a grant writer, a grant manager and a grant approver and for each of those 3 positions there should be 3 separate individuals pushing singular buttons. He said he was not here to cast aspersions on the past because he didn't know what their process was but he could say from an ethical standpoint that's how they are going to do things.

Mr. Deering said so going forward in the future it would be more streamlined and more competently.

Mr. Campbell said they are holding people to the procedure and that was a big thing. He said he actually walks the building and checks in with staff and asks them if they are having issues and then he checks to make sure the work is done at the end of the month. He said the biggest thing is keeping everything up to date and following the processes they've already outlined, strengthening the ones that need to be strengthened which the auditor points out for them. He said in theory they should be able to get everything done that they need to do it's just actually doing it. He said when he came in the biggest shock was when he looked at ESSER III at the end of Aug. 2023 and saw that that grant hadn't been reported to the federal government since Sept. 2022. The work wasn't being done he said.

Mr. Doig said that won't happen anymore.

Mrs. Haskell asked if the 3 roles that he mentioned is a realistic thing that could happen in town. She asked if those would be roles that they're actively recruiting for now or in 2024.

Mr. Campbell said the signer, CEO, admin or Superintendent whatever the name or title is of your organization should be the approver so that's not a separate job. He said the responsibility for accounting falls to the BA or the Finance Dept. and in extreme cases maybe where you have a multi-district or some kind of city environment you could consider a grant dept. or a grant accountant solely for the purpose of accounting for grants separately because fund accounting gets tricky and the more funds you have the more problems you run into and it becomes untenable for 1 person to manage all that.

He said the grant writer is the person that takes the grant, designs a narrative to prove why the organization needs the grant and then submits it to the federal government and they can't spend money on a grant that has not had an approved budget. He said the grant writer designs the expenditures, the narrative and getting it approved by the federal government and the accountant is accounting for that money and reprocessing the revenue to come back so there's an out, there's an in and there is someone watching everything happening. In this case they combined the positions and the Superintendent was writing her own grants and submitting

them to the federal government so there wasn't a check. Based on the reporting issues we've identified it's doubtful that anyone was really driving home the point that this work needed to be done following up on that work monthly he said.

Mrs. Haskell asked how we have done this historically.

Mr. Campbell said with the school he can't speak to past practice. He said the active grant writing doesn't change much so the process is you write a grant, you have to have budgetary numbers for those grants and you may go to your accountant to ask how much to put into retirement, FICA, etc. and then you would submit it. He said in this case he typed it all and pushed it through.

He said no one was doing anything with the revenue so he didn't know if they had a concrete process or if it was one month they took a swing at it and it fell apart so let's try something new. He said the grant writing was fine but the accounting for the grants was suboptimal so it led to issues and that's why there's a 3 check system to help prevent those issues. He said in smaller districts it may be more acceptable but our district is a good enough size where we can have at least 2 separate positions and then a check.

Ms. Mitchell asked if they are looking to hire a grant writer.

Mr. Campbell said they are looking to provide a unique solution here by incentivizing our own staff by accepting their volunteerism to help us write the narratives and then choosing someone to plug those narratives in so they don't have to design a whole new job for this.

Ms. Mitchell used the example if Mrs. Cardinal was a teacher and she knew about a grant and it's a big interest to her then she would write the narrative of what the benefit of it is and she would give it to...

Mr. Campbell said she caught right on and said it beautifully. He said he asked today if you're in facilities he needed you to do the work for the facilities related grants and bring that to the person to put it in and he will account for it.

Ms. Mitchell said that it makes sense that the subject matter expert should be the one to do it anyway in any type whether it's a grant or a contractor or whatever.

Mrs. Haskell said it makes sense because the teacher is the subject matter expert but then asked if there is a risk there.

Mr. Campbell said they weren't going to ask the teachers but would ask the admin staff to work with the teachers to guide them and because they want to have supplies and to plan for the future for supplies and open up some grant lines for funding and supplies. He said they are trying to build for a little bit beyond Sept. 2024 and he wants the projects and the impact of the grants to last as long as possible so if they take on a project-the lighting project is budget neutral and is not grant related but as an example they took on a big project like that and put it into a grant that's money that left our pocket for about a month we got it right back but we have upgraded facilities for the next 20 years until we need to work on them again and that is a benefit to this town and this district.

Mrs. Cardinal asked who the appointed School District Treasurer is right now.

Mr. Campbell said her name is Angie Hardin and he worked with her when she was in the banking sector as a Treasurer in another town.

Mrs. Cardinal asked if the School Board has already started seeing Treasurer's reports from her or if it is still too soon since she started.

Mr. Campbell said they've yet to actually turn over those reports to her and she is still a little bit new to that and she hasn't performed that function of her job so she'll need a little time to adjust.

Ms. Mitchell asked if someone was able to train her.

Mr. Campbell said they've had conversations already about what is expected, how to generate the reports in question and as a banker herself she is very familiar with reconciling.

Ms. Mitchell asked if she is expected to give a Treasurer's report for every School Board meeting or once a month.

Mr. Campbell said typically for fiscal tracking they go by the month so it would probably be a monthly reconciliation and a second pair of eyes on their bank account that makes sure they didn't miss anything when they reconciled.

Mr. Pitre said he had questions about Special Ed-what the percentage is of Spec Ed, the amount of Spec. Ed, the out of district costs, what they can do to bring it down and are they making any progress so kids can get off of Spec Ed if we can.

Mr. Doig said RSA 94:142 is the law that speaks to free and appropriate education. He said the first place they want to start is anything and everything they can do within the classroom or within the school environment and if it reaches a point where the needs are beyond their capacities then they're looking for district support. He said sometimes it could be somebody that comes in but in some cases depending on social, emotional or physical needs it may require an out of district placement.

He said having worked in out of district placements for the last 15 years being on the receiving side the school district is still responsible for that child's education but it does require an on-going and working relationship between the school district and the out of district placement provider with the goal of bringing the child back as soon as either the child's condition has stabilized or has reached a place with enough support where they can look at bringing the child back. He said he would love to say there's a standard rate across the board for all of these places but you do get what you pay for so if our Student Services Director wasn't as active as she is in making sure that services are being are being met and the kids' needs are being met we would be in a very different place. He said he agreed that it is costly but he can say they are actively taking care of the kids who are out of district with the goal of bringing them back. He said to the flip side some of the concerns that come up in a budget revolve around the professional development of staff. He said it is one thing to have a college degree but it isn't necessarily the be all and end all as brain development and research is made more aware in the

learning community that might require some of our staff to get additional training. He said that money is fairly well spent because they are not only asking teachers to take advantage of what's out there educationally but to come to the school and say this is where they were and this is what they're doing and we actually look at their professional development plan to see how they're implementing those things in the class.

He said he was sure they were familiar with the trainer model and in essence that's what this is. If we send 1 teacher out for a professional development activity and they develop a level of expertise they we don't have to subsequently send 5 or 10 teachers out to the same training they can take advantage of what the teacher is doing in the hopes that if a reason for sending a child to an out of district placement could then be managed through this training that the teacher acquired. Maybe we could lower our costs that way but these things don't happen overnight he said.

Mr. Campbell said when they talk about Spec Ed there are 2 types of costs that go through the roof-transportation and the contracting of professionals to support the child's specific needs. He said that could be a speech or occupational therapist and those costs are higher. He said the federal government has recognized this and we run a \$5 million program and they kick in about \$525,000 and that's proportionate so if you have more you get more.

He said regarding transport costs they have an ability to help control those cost by hiring and training the right staff to drive the right vehicles for these children and having those vehicles available they can bring those costs back under our roof which will substantially control that cost. He said when you have children that need to be sent out of district and you're doing that through a contracted service you have to design a program to enable that child to learn at your school. He said if you're able to do that successfully it does lower the cost it's just not always a possibility with the staff and resources that we have at the time and those professionals are equally as expensive to have in your building as it is to contract.

Mr. Doig said they will be hearing in the not too distant future that he is working with a team within the school as well as some colleagues from his previous workplaces to develop a therapeutic guidance model. He said the traditional guidance model might look at things like college placement but the therapeutic side is designed to look more at the things that might be emotionally percolating below the surface.

He said COVID did damage in more ways than one and they are starting to see that now through some of the behaviors that play out across the country not just in Farmington. He said they are trying to take advantage of the professionals within our school system to try to approach things differently and this will be one way to do that. He said there will be more information coming later on and they are going to do a survey of the staff to find out what the needs are that they're seeing and then branch that out to families for input as well. That's one thing families have been asking for and I'm looking for this not only to be successful for Farmington but to be a model that other schools can look at to help support the kids in their

systems as well.

Mr. Doig said as somebody who is new to Farmington the school facilities and the staff within and the relationships not only amongst the members of the School Board but the relationship with the community as a whole- he has worked in a lot of places where adversarial was the common denominator and he is happy to say he is not seeing that and he is grateful for that because it makes what they are trying to do a lot easier. I'm thankful for everyone's support and you'll hear more as we do more he said.

Mrs. Haskell said she liked that idea because what is happening is a few things-the Spec Ed needs, the behavioral issues the students are having, there's only so many guidance counselors to address that and they're also trying to address helping kids get to the next level and get to college so the reoccurring theme she has heard at School Board meetings and she is a coach in town so she also hears it from players is the ones that are doing well and trying to get to the next level are not feeling like they're getting the time. She said to break it down into those 2 different categories and what that guidance means is going to be critical in the next few years.

Mr. Campbell said it has an effect on more than just 1 thing because the happier the students are the easier the staff's job becomes and the easier their job becomes. He said it leads to cost savings in general because a well running school that's been optimized will perform better.

Ms. Mitchell asked if they are filling the positions finally.

Mr. Campbell said yes and there are only 16 open positions that he knows of right now.

Ms. Mitchell asked if that was for all 3 schools.

Mr. Campbell said yes unless they're missing open Para spots which could be a possibility. He said they have some transportation, Para, teacher and custodial openings.

Mrs. Parker added that they always need subs.

Mr. Pitre asked if they had a big turnover this year of teachers. He said he heard some rumors that there were quite a few turnovers and that would affect especially the pipeline on new teachers. He said Farmington has traditionally been we usually get the new teachers in and they get their experience here and on they go to other places.

Mr. Campbell said the board has put into place with the teachers' union in the last year a more competitive wage scale which blew even Milton out of the water and Milton wanted to be Farmington once they saw that.

Mr. Pitre said you're going to see that happen in a lot of school districts.

Mr. Campbell said he would love the opportunity to hold a Lakes Region-al type of thing and that would be fantastic not just for the taxpayers but for everybody. He said Farmington's are fantastic and he has been blown away by the staff that they have here even if they're new their commitment and drive is above and beyond and the admin staff they hired this year-the Director of Student Services, the Special Ed Director and the Curriculum Director are fantastic and they are envisioning a future now. If there's a future on the table I wholeheartedly believe that will spread to the school and people are going to want to stick around he said.

Mr. Doig said not to be a naysayer but they have some infrastructure that has reached its lifespan so as with the lighting they are trying to find ways to address these things before a problem arises and without having an impact on the tax rate so that's why collaboratively they were able to engineer a way to get the lighting done in a budget neutral way and in a cost effective way as well.

Mrs. Cardinal asked them to briefly elaborate on how they are doing that.

Mr. Campbell said the answer is a municipal lease which is a lease crafted with municipalities in mind so the terms are much more favorable. He said the lighting in all 3 schools and the outside lights the lighting is incredibly inefficient and it's old and fluorescent. He said the lighting costs this district a lot of money in electricity so this proposal fixes that issue.

Ms. Mitchell asked who the company is.

Mr. Campbell said Infinity Lighting out of Dover.

Mrs. Cardinal noted the Town used them.

Mr. Campbell said Rochester and Milton used them and they are an incredible company. He said they work with veterans to make their lights and the lights are made right in Dover. He said they crafted a policy where this lease pays for itself in your reduction in energy costs and Eversource is going to kick in \$130,000 towards this lease.

Ms. Mitchell said she had to laugh because this would have been done and paid for.

Mrs. Cardinal said this would have been in place 5 years ago if we didn't have a change in the School Board. She said this was all set to run in 2018.

Mr. Campbell said we're going to be cash positive on our electricity costs year over year starting next year so our electricity goes down in the budget.

Mrs. Cardinal asked if this is signed.

Mr. Campbell said it's done and it starts next Friday or Monday and they're starting the gym because they want to have the lighting redone for the winter tournament.

Mr. Doig said they are getting rid of the fluorescents and replacing them with LED's.

Mr. Campbell said if there is sun coming through the windows they dim themselves to save electricity, they turn off when there is no one in the room because they sense body heat and they have a 7 year warranty but the shelf life is 20 years but they can last up to 30 years. He said the proposal pays for itself by year 7, the warranty lasts through year 7 and then we're just collecting the residuals after that.

Mrs. Haskell said this is great but she had to go back to his previous comment when he said "infrastructure" and asked from a 10,000 ft. point of view what some of the other issues are because if people are listening to this and they hear infrastructure the first thing they are going to think of is we need a new school and the taxes are going to go up. She asked for a few examples of what that infrastructure means.

Mr. Campbell said last week when it rained they received pictures of them putting buckets everywhere and one was wedged up on top of door.

Mrs. Cardinal asked if the Henry Wilson School roof was leaking.

Mr. Campbell said yes.

Ms. Mitchell said she was hoping it wasn't the high school because a lot of work was done to the FHS roof and only some sections got done at Henry Wilson. She asked if it was leaking in the main entry way because she remembered that being an issue before.

Mr. Doig said in the main hallway and in several classrooms.

Mr. Campbell said this is something on their ESSER list so that's how they're going to try to deal with it.

Mr. Pitre said they should put a pitched roof on Henry Wilson and that school is over 70 years old.

Mr. Campbell said the windows have been identified as another issue and Mr. Doig loves the idea of getting rid of the windows there.

Mr. Doig said there was an audit performed by Seaman's in 2016 so that is where his information is coming from in terms of the life expectancy but at the time that report was written which was 4 years ago they were citing some of the boilers and they just had a dishwasher at Henry Wilson replaced for \$11,000 because the dishwasher that was there was so old that the part that was needed the company is out of business and nobody manufactures those parts. He said those are the kinds of things that are floating below the surface and it would be a disservice to for us to say that everything is rosy.

He said with regards to the windows in that Seaman's report it says a lot of the framing has issues, there are air leaks which increasing your heating costs and all of the windows are opaque. He said he was on a building committee years back and he educated himself on a lot of these things and opaque windows were an educational philosophy from the late 1950's and early 1960's that said to let sunlight into the room but don't let the people in the room see out so they can focus more on the learning that's going on. He said from a mental health standpoint that's not exactly the best for these kids so he would like to see all of the windows replaced in a cost effective manner that won't affect the tax rate. When we have some specifics for you on how we're going to pay for that we'll let you know he said.

Mr. Doig said they are trying to address things in a reasonable fashion and it would be wrong to say let's replay the Seaman's report and pay for everything yesterday.

Mr. Pitre said they seemed to have fixed all their problems here tonight money-wise (somewhat) and asked what the next step is.

7). Initiate 2024-2025 School District Budget Process:

Mr. Campbell handed out budget folders to the members and said they are proposing a 2.6% increase and the default budget is higher and it needs to be checked by legal counsel. He said he still anticipates the default to be higher unless they remove everything they chose to put in there but he doesn't think that they will.

He said most of those decisions were made under guidance from the community and from the

School Board and everyone took pride in getting this done in the time that they had.

Ms. Mitchell asked if they were happy with this even though they felt rushed.

Mr. Campbell said he is happy because he learned a lot through this process. He said they looked at actual data they didn't just come up with the numbers. He said he asked the staff to think long and hard about what they needed not what they wanted but what they needed. We jumped off from there, we identified some things that they need back in their budget and most of them are coming off of our grants keeping those positions like our School Resource Officers and some of the bigger bullet points he said.

He said they are getting creative again with supplies, how they are managing our projects and it wouldn't behoove them to request some absurd amount of money when they already returned a significant portion this year. He said they started with what they actually spent they only added what they needed to add on and brought it here tonight.

Mr. Pitre asked when they wanted to present their budget and that he heard it was Dec. 10.

Mr. Campbell said this was his confusion and that he built a whole presentation and that he has it here tonight but they can do the 10th.

Mr. Doig said the Town's needs come first but before he accepted this job they planned a get-away with his 84 year old mother-in-law and this may be her last trip so he is not available the week of Dec. 10.

Ms. Mitchell noted that Dec. 10 is a Sunday and she is not available because they are having family photos taken that day!

Mr. Pitre asked the members to come up with a date most of them can agree with and suggested they should have a chance to "chew over" the paperwork they just received.

After some discussion consensus of the committee was that Mr. Doig should be present and to schedule their next meeting for Dec. 20 at 7 p.m.

Mrs. Haskell asked Mr. Pitre to make sure the Town website is updated because it says their next meeting is on Dec. 13.

Mr. Morgan added that the Planning Board has a meeting at 6 p.m. on Dec. 20 and asked if that would interfere with their meeting.

Mr. Pitre said they may have to meet in the conference room.

8).Member/Public Comment:

New Member-Mr. Pitre said the committee is short 3 members and asked for a motion to put Jim Horgan as one of the Budget Committee members.

Motion: (Cardinal, second Staples) to appoint Mr. James Horgan as a Budget Committee member through the next election passed 8-0.

Kudos-Mrs. Parker thanked Mr. Doig and Mr. Campbell for all the work that they have done and that she wanted to acknowledge and thank Tim Brown for all his help with getting this completed.

Mr. Campbell said Mr. Brown took a lot of time out of his day twice to join them for 2 evening

meetings to help steer them through the process. We thank you for that he said.

Mr. Pitre said it was a tough go because when you lose people like that in the middle of the stream it's not easy. He said it was a great thing that they can all come together and not be hitting each other over the head with a club.

Mr. Campbell said at a meeting earlier today he said he liked to think that when the school does good the town does good and they want to see everybody do good and they want this community to thrive.

Mary Barron said the first crash through this process they were looking at a potential \$5 to a \$5.50 increase and her words were "I don't think so". She said through the process of going back, relooking and doing some historical content and looking at things that were originally scheduled to come out of the operating budget and can be moved into ESSER they did some incredible brain storming and she is exhausted and she didn't even do most of the work.

She said what this small group of people was able to pull off between what would have been a \$3 or \$4 million bottom line increase to what they saw tonight as a 51 cent decrease in her history she didn't remember the school budget ever going down.

Mr. Pitre said plus they had 2 contracts which was awesome.

Mrs. Barron said it was an incredible process and with the yanking, the pulling and the tugging they now have a template to use. She said the other thing she would encourage them to do is start the budget in Sept. not mid-Nov. She said with the lack of high end leadership what they've been able to work through this- they all felt they were all on an equal plain, they argued and swore and smiled a lot, ate a lot of snacks and it's been an incredible journey for the most part. She said sometimes you focus on the negative and they had a rough first couple of weeks with busing problems and scheduling problems but they didn't have someone to turn to so the board members would just go in and do whatever they had to do and that began the process of probably one of the strongest teams she has ever worked on. To pull this together, to respect each other to the point that we knew it had to be done, we had more things going against us than we had for us but we got this to you folks tonight. What you got tonight is historically what you would have gotten right before Thanksgiving so we get those to you, you start working them and we're accessible. If you have questions shoot us an e-mail because any of the things we can settle before the 20th is just going to make that night go easier she said.

Dispatch/Prosecution-Mr. Staples said there was a question about the Dispatch/Prosecutor line and 2023 the current year was \$41,751 and that covered their old Prosecutor Jean Reed and what they paid to the County for the dispatch. He said in 2024 Chief Orlando has proposed that it increase to \$42,731 and that will cover the new Prosecutor they just signed on and the County went up 10% and this coming year it will be \$10,727 for the dispatch alone. He said the other \$32,004 is split up monthly and goes to our Prosecutor.

He said in the past couple of years they have seen that line drastically increase because it was \$7,000 and Det. Matt Embrey was prosecuting for the Town and they went through a streak

where they were having a hell of a time trying to get officers and retain them and they have an asset to the Town that should be out patrolling and doing detective work spending most of his time prosecuting. He said the Selectmen found it to be cheaper and more efficient for the Town to hire a Prosecutor and put Matt Embrey back in his spot as a Detective.

Mr. Morgan said he thought the Sherriff's Dept. did the prosecuting.

Mr. Staples said the state will prosecute felony charges and domestic violence but Class A, Class B misdemeanors the Town is responsible for taking care of it. So either we pay them a huge bill, prosecute it ourselves or we hire a Prosecutor which is what we opted to do he said.

9). Adjournment:

Motion: (Parker, second Mitchell) to adjourn the meeting passed 8-0 at 8:18 p.m.

Kathleen Magoon
Recording Secretary

Joe Pitre, Chairman

27 Dec 23