Hopkinton Budget Committee
Public Hearing
September 23, 2009
Hopkinton Middle/High School Auditorium

Budget Committee Chair Patrice Gerseny called the meeting to order at 6:30 p.m. Budget Committee members present: Patrice Gerseny, Marion Paxton, George Langwasser, Karen Irwin, Cameron Ford, Tom O'Donnell, David Lancaster, David Luneau, and Bob Carpenter.

Ms. Gerseny gave an overview of the two warrant articles coming before the town at the Special School District meeting on October 21st.

The first warrant article was read: To see if the School District will vote to approve the Collective Bargaining Agreement reached between the Hopkinton School Board and the Hopkinton Educational Support Staff for one year. There is no tax impact for this article. (The Hopkinton School Board recommends this article.)(The Hopkinton Budget Committee will vote tonight whether to recommend this article.)

The second warrant article was read: To see if the School District will vote to approve the cost items included in the collective Bargaining Agreement reached between the Hopkinton School Board and the Hopkinton Education Association, which calls for the following increases in salaries and benefits:

Year	Estimated Increase
2009-2010	$ 11,412
2010-2011	$133,128

and further to raise and appropriate the sum of Eleven Thousand, Four Hundred and Twelve Dollars ($11,412) for the 2009-2010 fiscal year, such sum representing the additional costs attributable to the increase in salaries and benefits over those of the appropriation at current staffing levels paid in the 2008-2009 fiscal year. (The Hopkinton School Board recommends this article.)(The Hopkinton Budget Committee will vote tonight whether to recommend this article.)

The specifics of the HEA contract were discussed. The increase for the 2009-2010 year includes increases in life insurance and dental coverage prorated for 8 months; the teacher substituting for teacher rate, and an administrative fee for the 403B plan. For the second year, in addition to the full-year rate for the above changes, there would be an attendance bonus, the cost for step increases and first-year longevity payments, and a one-time cost of living adjustment to those who don't qualify for step increases or first-year longevity payments.

The specifics of the HESS contract were then discussed. The proposed contract represents level funding from last year, with no budgetary appropriation. It is being discussed at this hearing because of the Evergreen Clause, a state law which requires scheduled salary increases to be paid after existing collective bargaining agreements expire. If passed, these will be the first Hopkinton contracts to come under this clause.

The HESS contract includes step increases not being taken this year. Negotiations for a new contract will begin in Novermber, and the district must vote on it in March. If the one-year contract currently proposed is approved but the subsequent contact in March is not approved, the Evergreen clause will come into effect. Under the Evergreen Clause, the cost of step increases, assuming constant staffing levels, would be $23,056 for HESS for 2010-2011 and $44,849 for HEA for 2011-2012.

Ms. Gerseny opened the meeting to discussion.

Jim Hersey asked whether any step increases for 2009-2010 would take effect in this year? Ms. Gerseny responded that there is no contract at present, and even if the proposed contracts pass, there will be no step increases for this year for HESS or HEA.

Tom Manseau asked for an explanation of the attendance bonus. Professionals such as teachers are expected to be at work whenever they are capable, and he wondered whether this is a management issue with the building principals.

Steve Chamberlin, Superintendent of SAU 66, responded that the goal of the bonus was to try an innovative approach to increasing teacher time with students. There are no attendance issues with teachers; the thought was that the timing is good to try a new approach, because no salary increases are being proposed.

Chris Wallace asked why a new contract is coming before voters at this time if no money is involved. Is it just for the Evergreen Clause? Mr. Chamberlin responded that state law requires negotiation in good faith when a contract is not approved. Having a contract stabilizes the budget process. If the one-year HESS budget is passed, negotiations will begin in November for another contract to go before the voters in March. Mr. Wallace noted that a great deal of time will be spent on negotiations; Mr. Chamberlin responded that one reason for the one-year contract with HESS is to allow for staggering contracts so that they don't always expire at the same time.

Joy Bloomfield asked whether the $11,000 amount for the HEA contract will show on December tax bills, and the answer was yes, it would.

Mr. Manseau asked for the total amount for the contracts. Mr. Chamberlin responded that the district votes on the increase only, so he didn't have the total amount at hand, but would make those figures available. Michelle Clark, Business Adminstrator for the district noted that the HESS contract is approximately $1.5 million, but she did not have the HEA amount.

Mr. Hersey asked for clarification about the provision for laptop computers: Per the contract, the district would buy the laptop, and after three years it would become the property of the teacher who requested that benefit. Teachers can avail themselves of this benefit every three years, in lieu of tuition reimbursement for those three years.

Tana Montore asked what effect the transfer would have on software license agreements for the laptops. Mr. Chamberlin responded that the district would have to negotiate a buyout of the license with the teacher, or else remove the software from the computers.

Al Bloomquist noted that there are not many teachers in the district who are on the lower levels of the pay scale and subject to step increases. He asked what the percentage of teachers without tenure is. Ms. Gerseny responded that there are 6 teachers with under five years' experience in the district and 34 on the step portion rather than at the longevity level. Mr. Bloomquist noted that these teachers are a minor portion of our total teachers; Marion Paxton agreed, noting that a total number of 103 teachers were included in negotiations.

Mr. Hersey asked for clarification on the difference between the cost of step increases and the first-time longevity payment in the contract. Mr. Chamberlin responded that the step increases apply to those teachers who have up to 15 years' experience, and the first-time longevity payment is approximately $1300 for those who have reached that cap. For those who are beyond that point, the cost of living payment over two years would be $500. Mr. Bloomquist asked whether that payment would be made every year; Mr. Chamberlin responded that teachers start at different bases, and step and longevity payments can differ. There are 68 teachers who currently qualify for longevity payments.

Hearing no further discussion, Ms. Gerseny closed the public hearing at 6:55 p.m. for a brief recess.

Ms. Gerseny called the Budget Committee meeting to order at 7:05 p.m.

Marion Paxton moved and Bob Carpenter seconded that the Budget Committee recommend Article I as presented. Ms. Gerseny opened the meeting to discussion.

Cameron Ford expressed his concern with the Evergreen Clause, which is an unfunded mandate by the state.

David Luneau noted that this is a valid point. He further noted that the clause does not guarantee each teacher a raise - it moves them up a step. Teachers at the top of the pay scale are not guaranteed a raise under the Evergreen Clause. He also noted that the increases for both the HEA and HESS contracts are far less than historical contractual increases.

Mr. Ford stressed his concern that this change means that step increases are now out of the hands of voters.

David Lancaster commended HEA and HESS for listening to the voters at the town meetings by not asking for salary increases. He noted that the means to control salaries will be in addressing the cost of living adjustments for those at top of the scale, because those increases are not automatic.

Ms. Paxton noted that the Budget Committee can vote to fund the contracts or not, but cannot change them – that is the mandate of the school board and administration in negotiation with the teachers and HESS.

Karen Irwin noted that the Budget Committee had asked the School Board to determine the percentage increases in salary . Twenty staff are at 0% and 39 are at 4-5%, for 59 total in 2010-2011. The cost of step increases, with no personnel changes, would be $19,960.

Mr. Lancaster noted that the range of wages for the HESS employees was between $8.86 and $17.21 per hour; for 1,080 hours in a contract year the salaries in question range between roughly $8,000-$20,000 per year.

Mr. Langwasser supports the HESS contract but noted that the Evergreen Clause is unfair to taxpayers, because it removes a tool of collective bargaining – there is less drive for a bargaining unit to resolve a contract with a guaranteed raise.

Hearing no further discussion, Ms. Gerseny called for a roll vote, and motion to recommend Article I was passed as follows: Paxton-yes, Langwasser-yes, Lancaster-yes, Irwin-yes, Ford-yes, Luneau-yes, O'Donnell-yes, Carpenter-yes.

Mr. Lancaster moved to recommend Article II, seconded by Ms. Irwin. Mr. Lancaster noted his disapproval of paying teachers for attendance –professionals should not take mental health days. Although the item is budget neutral it sends a poor message - teachers should attend unless they are sick.

Mr. Luneau responded that the purpose of the provision was not to require teachers to show up to work – it was an attempt to find an innovative solution to increase the number of hours with students and to improve professional time with students.

Ms. Paxton suggested that the administration tracks this provision for the next two years to see if there's a differential in the bottom line between the substitute costs and the attendance bonus. Depending on the cost, this may be used as a bargaining point in the future.

Mr. Carpenter noted that this item provides a merit incentive for those who take very few days off.

Ms. Irwin stated that if passed, Article II affects 103 teaching positions. Of these teachers, 82 would get $0, 13 would receive a 2-3% increase, and 8 would receive 3-4%. The total cost would add $44,849 to the operating budget for 2011-2012, with no personnel changes.

Ms. Gerseny called for a roll vote. Motion to recommend Article II passed as follows: Paxton-yes, Langwasser-yes, Lancaster-yes, Irwin-yes, Ford-yes, Luneau-yes, O'Donnell-abstain, Carpenter-yes.

Motion to adjourn was passed at 7:28 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Sue Batchelder