

**Town of Hopkinton
Budget Committee Meeting Minutes
Wednesday, February 24, 2016
APPROVED 5-11-16**

CALL TO ORDER:

Chair Janet Krzyzaniak called the Budget Committee meeting to order at 5:30PM at the Town Hall.

Attendees: Janet Krzyzaniak, Amy Bogart, Deborah Norris, Diana Wieland, Don Houston, Ken Traum (Select Board rep.) and Bill Chapin, Jr. (School Board rep.).

Absent: Richard Horner, Virginia Haines and Richard Houston.

Also Present: Peter Yunich & Arnold Coda.

MINUTES:

Chair Krzyzaniak offered to approve the Draft Meeting Minutes of the Public Hearing held on February 3, 2016 and asked if there were any corrections.

Several members recommended minor changes. Mr. Don Houston noted that on page 10, both Mr. Richard Houston and Mr. Dave Luneau made incorrect statements, regarding “the School Board has gone flat for the last two years” and “the School Board has been slowing the growth for the last nine years”.

Ms. Bogart agreed the statements were incorrect, but because that is what they said, they must leave them in the minutes. The members agreed.

Mr. Don Houston moved to approve the February 3, 2016 Budget Committee Public Hearing Meeting minutes, as amended. Motion passed unanimously 7-0.

Chair Krzyzaniak thanked the members for meeting tonight to approve these minutes.

OTHER BUSINESS:

Chair Krzyzaniak asked if there was any other business to discuss and the response was yes.

Amy Bogart stated she is not happy with the School Board presentations conducted at the Public Hearing (held on 2/3/16). Mr. Chapin responded the School Board wanted people to know that there were two budgets, the one the Budget Committee was recommending and the other the School Board recommended, which was higher.

His presentation to show them side by side, he felt was for clarity to show the difference.

Chair Krzyzaniak suggested that in hind sight, maybe the Budget Committee should have presented their “School Budget” and then the School Board could have presented a different budget.

Bill Chapin added the School Board had a different opinion of the Budget Committee’s budget and they wanted the public to be made aware of the difference.

Bill Chapin presented both the Budget Committee's recommended school budget and the School Board's budget and he stated that in the future, maybe they should have two different people present the two separate budgets, if they are not the same. It was noted that this was the first time the School Board and the Budget Committee had not agreed on a bottom line; usually they do agree.

It was noted there still remains a difference of \$7,000 regarding the football program. The Budget Committee does not recommend it and the School Board does.

Bill Chapin added there was confusion with the different contracts that were being negotiated, including the fuel bid at the last minutes and he was trying to be clear about all that information.

Chair Krzyzaniak stated she understood how hard it was for the School to get the final figures, as they were working on them last minute to finalize, just prior to the Public Hearing.

Bill Chapin suggested they discuss a process, for if in the future, the School Board has two different budgets (one the Budget Committee recommends and one the School Board wants to recommend).

Chair Krzyzaniak noted she doesn't remember ever having two different budget figures in the past, the School Board has always agreed with the Budget Committee, prior to the Public Hearing meeting.

Chair Krzyzaniak noted the Public Hearing is the Budget Committee's Budgets and that is what should be presented for the Town, School, Contoocook Village Precinct & the Hopkinton Village Precinct.

Bill Chapin added the final figures for the fuel contract was not known until the night of the Public Hearing.

Deb Norris added this is a learning process for her, with two different budgets and she suggested the explanations be clearer at the meeting.

Bill Chapin inquired whether or not students are allowed to speak at the Public Hearing or at the School District meeting. He added for clarity purposes, it should be announced at the beginning of the meeting.

Deb Norris stated she recently attended the "Cookies with Cass" event held at the Library and found it to be very informative. The Town Administrator (Neal Cass) explained the Budgeting process and held a Question & Answer period. She felt those in attendance left with a much better understanding and she suggested that the School Board hold the same kind of meeting.

Chair Krzyzaniak added the Budget Committee could also hold a presentation at the Senior Center and explain to the public the purpose and process of the Budget Committee.

Bill Chapin stated the Budget Committee has tried very hard to be transparent and have invited the public to attend any of their meetings held often between December and February.

It was noted there was a large turnout at the Public Hearing this year, (more than usual); but that the Budget Committee meetings, for the most part, do not attract anyone from the public.

Diana Wieland noted that she was very surprised that the School Board conducted their own Budget presentation. She added that it was strategically masterful to present the two budgets side by side. She thought it was just going to be the Budget Committee's recommended budget; not two different ones.

Chair Krzyzaniak noted in the past, the Budget Committee members did present the budgets and not the Town, School Board and Precincts themselves at the Public Hearing.

Don Houston stated the Budget Committee should present an overview of each budget and have members of the Town or School available to answer any questions they may not have the specifics on.

Diana Wieland added the meetings are all open to the public and anyone can attend any of the meetings during the process, prior to the Public Hearing, to be informed and understand the details.

Diana also mentioned that inaccurate statements were made at the Public Hearing and there was no one that stood up to disagree or correct the statements.

Don Houston stated that the Budget Committee had worked very hard for three to four months, prior to the Public Hearing, regarding a zero budget for the School and he thought the Committee was all in agreement and then at the Public Hearing, several members changed their minds and voted differently. He added we are not required to “rubber stamp” what the School Board wants. He thought it was wrong.

Chair Krzyzaniak added she thought too, that they had all agreed and noted that it was discussed at the meetings and she thought “all were on the same wave length”; and within a few minutes, at the Public Hearing; things changed.

Bill Chapin added the School Board was informed of what the Budget Committee expected and they tried to get the number down; and they got to a \$7,000 difference. He added the Budget Committee did have an impact on them (School Board) and they did take their guidance from the Budget Committee.

Don Houston stated that Mr. Chapin must have been pleasantly surprised by the outcome of the change in the Budget Committee vote.

It was noted there was a \$160,000 difference in the budgets for the school. Also, they do not know for sure how much State Aid they will receive at this time.

Don Houston reiterated how absolutely dismayed he is at the vote at the Public Hearing on the School budget.

It was noted they need to operate as a committee going forward. Deb Norris added she respects the Budget Committee’s numbers and will want to look at the costs for next year.

Don Houston responded the Committee should look at the budgets, the numbers and work to control the tax rate.

At 6:30PM, Chair Krzyzaniak opened the meeting to the public.

PUBLIC COMMENT:

Peter Yunich asked the Committee members if their relationship with the School Board and Select Board is advisory or collaborative or what? He added, by law, the Committee has the judiciary responsibility to act on behalf of the Town.

He also added he thought it was unconscionable at the Public Hearing, that the School Board had the gall to present a different budget than what the Budget Committee recommended. He said the towns' residents are very angry. He has received more phone calls than he wants to receive about it.

He wants fresh eyes to look at what the School Board does. He requested (to School Board rep.) Bill Chapin, an accounting of the costs for each sport and how many athletes participate in each sport, based on the per capita. He would like this broken out info for the School District meeting. (i.e. football program \$7,000 vs per capita cost). He added we may not be able to afford ALL the sports.

Peter Yunich also stated the residents feel that there is no expectation that the School Board budget will not be just voted in. He added the Town of Bow is looking into changes in the functions of the School Board; to look at a solid education system, at a far different lower cost.

Peter Yunich asked Bill Chapin to ask the School Board for the info and Chair Krzyzaniak suggested he contact the School Board directly and not the Budget Committee, for the info.

Chair Krzyzaniak stated in hind sight, maybe she as Chair, should have recessed the Public Hearing, especially because it was so late (11:30-11:45PM) and give the Budget Committee time to digest all the new info and then take a final vote (at a later date).

Peter Yunich added he thought the "Budget Committee" was a "great hope of community" to take charge and be adversarial and the members would want to try to see if this could be done differently. We need the same attendance at the School District Meeting that we get for Town Meeting.

Peter Yunich inquired about the cost for the School to do the field lining and will the Recreation Department be billing the school directly. Ken Traum responded he would check into it.

At 6:48PM, Arnold Coda added from 1989 – 1996, the fields were in the school budget and they reimbursed the Town, but the process changed and now it is in the Town budget. Ken Traum noted the Recreation Dept. is currently working with the school on the fields.

It was also acknowledged that people are not attending the Budget Committee meetings and that the parents of school age children, know they only have to show up at the School District Meeting, to get the budget voted in.

Arnold Coda also stated the he attended the recent "Cookies with Cass" event with approximately 40 in attendance; at the Library and noted Town Administrator Neal Cass did an outstanding job. No one knows the process and they all learned. It was clear that they wanted to learn the process and left well informed. It just amazes him that people do not avail themselves of getting the information ahead of Town Meeting.

He added, regarding the School budget, it upsets him that the School Board wants to present a bond issue for next year. He further added that no one looks ahead for what increases there will be next year. He recommended that the School District look at the budget year round, not just a few months of the year. The public needs to be made aware of future expenses.

It was also noted, with a handout from the NH Municipal Association, that it is in fact the Budget Committee's budgets and the Chair is the Moderator for the Public Hearing. He thought it was a "mess" between the School Board presenting the Budget Committee's budget and then a second budget the School Board recommends.

Bill Chapin added the estimate of fund balance surplus was approximately \$400,000, and so they should be able to reduce the \$163,000 difference with the end of year surplus.

Arnold Coda stated for the record, he is opposed to the School Board budget increase.

He also noted they have had bigger turnouts (than this year's Public Hearing) because the school budgets were so high and parents attended to support the school budget, to educate their children.

In response to a question, Bill Chapin reiterated class size was discussed at length by Steve Chamberlin at a prior meeting with the Budget Committee, when they were going through the process.

Arnold Coda stated people are upset and feel powerless with the school budget and are feeling quite disenfranchised.

Arnold Coda added when he first came to Town, the SAU was comprised of Hopkinton, John Stark, Henniker and Washington, for K-12 grades. They thought by separating, they could have a quality of education superior to the current district, but were not prepared for the high cost to operate as one Town.

Don Houston provided a handout for the Committee members to review and asked that the "Summary of the Tax Rate" be made available at the School District Meeting on March 5th and at Town Meeting on Sat. March 12, 2016.

Mr. Don Houston MOTIONED to adjourn the meeting at 7:15PM. Mr. Ken Traum seconded. Motion carried 7-0.

Respectfully submitted,

Deborah Gallant