

**Somersworth School Board
Minutes of the Public Hearing
Proposed 19-20 Budget**

February 18, 2019

Somersworth City Hall

6:55PM

(Board Members Present: Don Austin, Mark Richardson, John O'Brien, Gerri Cannon, Maggie Larson, Matt Hanlon, Kyla Yoder and Tom McCallion. Excused: Kelly Brennan)

PUBLIC HEARING:

1. **Call to Order:** Austin opened the public hearing at 6:55pm.
2. **Public Comments Relative to the proposed 19-20 budget:** Wendy Berkeley stated that she is the District Farm to School Coordinator. She stated that after having discussions with Krauss, Lane and Gadomski, despite asking for support for her role, she was prepared to not have funding in the proposed budget. She stated that she is seeking financing from other sources. She stated that since 46% of our students participate in the free and reduced lunch program there may be some funding from the Healthy Kids Initiative. She stated that there are two numbers that I want to focus on. She stated that the first is \$5700.00. She stated that this is the actual savings that the Middle School realized when they started composting with Mr. Fox in the 2017-2018 school year. She stated that it resulted in the removal of one dumpster which cost \$5700.00 per year. She stated that the other number is \$4250.00. She stated that this is what Mr. Fox charges for both the Middle School and Maple Wood to compost the waste. She stated that John Watts, the owner of Mr. Fox, visited both schools this year and was very impressed with how the Middle School has moved from 0 to 60 in such a short time in their composting and recycling. She stated that Maple Wood only has one dumpster and you can't get rid of it, but perhaps we could get a smaller dumpster or have fewer pickups. She stated that she can look for money from other sources and let's face it, we are all replaceable. She stated that she wants everyone to support the composting in the schools and if you don't you risk incurring an increase in the district's expenditures. She stated that we lose the opportunity for our other schools to create greater savings. Ken Bolduc stated that he is not finding any problems with the budget. He stated that you alluded to some of the revenue and grants. He stated he would like a presentation on the revenue part of the budget. He stated that the budget is the easy part for the Board. He stated that the revenue is the difficult part and you have to pay for what you'll be approving. He stated that the formulas are very entailed and some of the money you don't see until the books are closed in one year. He stated that if you have more revenues than you anticipate the people never see it because excess revenues go into the General Fund. He stated that the School Board does not have a giant checkbook. He stated that he would like to see a presentation on revenues and the problems they create for us paying for the budget. He stated that the top line in revenues are the taxes that you pay. He stated that the shortfalls that you have show up in your taxes. Phil Yoder asked the Board to vote down the budget. He stated that he would like the budget to reflect the actual needs, the reality of our needs. He stated that he agrees that it is a hard thing to cut the Social Worker and he says don't make that cut and go to the City and ask for an override. He stated that Dover just presented a budget to their City Council that was over the tax cap by \$1.5 million. He stated that he is not suggesting that we do that but he is suggesting that we get an accurate accounting of what we need. He stated that the Town is what it is and I don't know what else to say other than we need a Social Worker. He stated that it is a deep cut and something that we really need and something that we should at least ask for an override so that we can keep this

position. He stated that the elevator is another and if it goes it will be \$300,000-\$400,000 to replace. He stated that he understands that if it goes, anyone who relies upon it will be moved to another school which we would have to pay for. He stated that if it goes, that will be an extra expense that we would have to pay. He stated that we would be in violation of the ADA Act and we would have to pay for students to go to another district. He stated this is something that we have to think about when we think about what we are going to do with this funding. He stated that \$50,000.00 is not enough for the upkeep of our technology. He stated that he is not saying to ask for \$150,000 but can we ask for an additional \$20,000 or another \$50,000? He stated that we need to put ourselves on a better platform where we can say we are going to continue to provide a good education to our kids. He stated that we had good technology at Idlehurst but now they are aging technologies. He stated if we do not support those things they become antiquated and become useless. He stated we should not undercut anything that we want to move forward on. He stated that Austin had said that we are going to have to deal with these kinds of cuts perpetually for the next several years. He stated he would like to see the School Board have a working relationship with the City. He stated that we have three revenue sources. He stated we have the City, the State and the Federal level. He stated that at some point we are going to have to start lobbying our State Representatives and ask what we can do to figure out some revenue sources and where can we make some changes. He stated that we need to ask if the State can change these formulas? He stated that this is a long term goal, perhaps 2-5 or 10 years down the line. He stated that if you get people on board you can go to the City and tell them you are going to try and figure out if we can get the State to change how they make these determinations. He stated that at the Federal level there are Grants out there. He stated that maybe there is a Grant that could fund an elevator. He stated that we are cutting into legitimate needs. He stated that there are people in this Town that can write Grants and know how to go after Grants. He stated that if we did this on a State and Federal level, then we can go back to the City and tell them that these are the things that we are doing on our own to try to help ourselves from a revenue standpoint. He stated then you could ask if the City would be willing to override the tax cap to the tune of \$100,000 or \$200,000 over four or five years, understanding that we are trying to supplement that income. He stated that if everyone is on the same page then we are not fighting against each other. He stated we are fighting the same battle and talking to the same people. He stated that if we just sit back and wait for the next cut, that is reactive thinking and it is just going to bury us. He stated that if we do not put money into the schools the enrollment will continue to go down, the tax base will continue to go down, the influx of people coming to the Town will decrease and you still have less money. He stated that it is a downward spiral that you will not be able to recover from. He stated that the two things people think about when moving to a Town are how much the taxes are and if the school system is viable. He stated that if we get into a situation where the school system is no longer viable and our taxes are high we need to counteract this and the only way we are going to do that is if we are all talking about it the same way. He stated those three revenue sources don't change so let's all try to get on the same page. He stated let's be proactive about this. He stated that here is a line from Bukowski that I read today. "Your life is your life. Don't let it be clubbed into dark submission." He stated let's go look for the money. He stated that there are people around here and I'll help. He stated let's not wait for the next big boulder to come down on us like an elevator that doesn't work. Michelle Nash stated that she wanted to thank Austin and his committee for making the difficult cuts and getting the budget to where it needs to be. She stated that she wants to encourage the continuance of the composting. She stated that she has been involved with it this year and she thinks it is an important program,

not only for the budget but also for the kids who go to Maple Wood and the Middle School who are seeing the results. She stated that she is a staff member, a parent and a paraprofessional and she wants the Board to think of everything that they had to cut and prioritize what is most important. She stated that the Social Worker position is very important so we need to fight for that. She stated that instead of adding programs and adding positions we just seem to keep taking them away.

Public hearing was closed at 7:13 pm.

Melinda Sullivan
Board Secretary

Pending Board Approval