

Draft Minutes
WEST RIVER MODIFIED UNIFIED EDUCATION DISTRICT BOARD
SPECIAL MEETING
Monday, December 21, 2020 at 7:00 PM

Present: *Board:* Al Claussen, Joe Winrich, Dana West, Emily Long, Howard Ires, Keighan Chapman-Eaker, Ken McFadden, LeeAnn Jillson, Mike Foley, Trish Scott
Administration: Bill Anton, Bob Thibault, Laurie Garland, Pam Bernardo, Scott Tabachnick, Chris Medina, Craig Roach
Members of the Public: Kristina Wright, Ansley, Beth Beattie, Caitlin Persa, Hannah Parker, Heather Sperling, Johanna, Katie Hazelton, Kris Jerz, Renee Merluzzi, Rory O'Donnell, Saracipot, Sue Stomski, Terry, Tammy Claussen

Call to Order

The meeting was called to order at 7:01 PM.

Board Norms

Mr. Claussen read aloud the board norms.

Members of the Public

Additions or Corrections to Agenda

Mr. Anton added a section for Correspondence to the agenda.

Correspondence

The board received some correspondence from a concerned parent in regards to going remote for the 2 weeks following school vacation. The parent requested to not have the students go remote after vacation but rather go back to in-person learning right away. Mr. Claussen commented it would be difficult to make a change so close to school vacation and a lot of planning has gone into preparing for the students to go remote.

New Business

Announced Tuition 2021-2022

Mrs. Garland stated she does not currently have Burr and Burton's tuition rates yet to compare to. As of right now kindergarten and elementary tuition are at \$14,400 and she recommends raising the tuition to \$14,800. Secondary tuition is currently at \$17,900 and Mrs. Garland recommends raising to \$18,400. This equates to a 2.8% increase year over year.

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Mr. McFadden made a motion to raise the tuition. Mrs. Bertram second.

Mrs. Chapman-Eaker asked what the cutoff grade is for elementary? Mrs. Garland mentioned elementary consists of K-5th grade.

Mr. Claussen called for a vote on Mr. McFadden's motion. The motion passed unanimously.

FY 22 Budget 1st Draft

Mrs. Garland went over what is included in the budget 1st look:

- Tax rate is calculated using FY 21 equalized pupil as part of the hold harmless provision in place for FY22.

Mrs. Garland mentioned the first passed equalized pupils for FY22 are 514.66. This affects the tax rate by \$.02 which is not significant. The ADM count for FY21 was 32.99 students down from the previous ADM. Mr. Claussen asked what the before and after was on FY20 and FY21. Mrs. Garland spoke in FY20 the ADM count was 512.69 and FY21 was 479.70. This drop was mostly due to more home school students.

- Staffing changes that occurred after the FY 21 budget was approved.
- Benefit changes including the 10% increase in premiums and application of the mandated healthcare law.
- Increases/decreases from the approved WCSU Superintendent's budget, Special Education budget and proposed Fee for service budget (formerly agency fund).
- Adjustments based on actuals where applicable.
- Increases based on repairs/maintenance costs, including HVAC maintenance estimates.
- Student – Staff Counts and Ratios and 2018-2019 Regional Comparisons.

Potential Tax Rate

Mrs. Garland stated there is a year over year increase of about 1.46% but it takes into account major reductions. Totaling about \$173,000 reduced expenses from year over year and loans being paid off.

Mrs. Garland explained the offsetting revenues are projected to be down 24%. The majority of the 24% decrease in year over year revenue is from the decrease in tuition students coming into Leland and Gray. In FY20 49 students were budgeted

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and only 33 students were billed. The other reductions are from grants and Medicaid.

The projected tax rate includes: December 1st yield of \$10,763 reduced from \$10,998, threshold increase of \$33.00, same equalized pupils and CLA's as FY21. Mr. West asked since the towns are not doing any reappraisals this year would it make a difference? Mrs. Garland responded saying it could hold steadier but it isn't exactly known at this point.

The potential unified tax rate is \$2.213 which includes the \$.04 cent merger incentive. This is compared to FY21 unified tax rate of \$1.986. Using the FY21 CLA the town tax rates are as follows not using the 5% hold harmless:

FY21		FY22 <i>Does not apply 5% Hold Harmless</i>	
Brookline	\$1.7842	Brookline	\$2.0907
Jamaica	\$1.9865	Jamaica	\$2.2246
Newfane	\$1.9510	Newfane	\$2.2843
Townshend	\$1.9670	Townshend	\$2.2257

These numbers represent a 17% increase in Brookline, 12% increase in Jamaica, 17% increase in Newfane and 13% increase in Townshend. However, Brookline, Newfane and Townshend will qualify again for the 5% hold harmless this year. Mrs. Garland mentioned the "magic" number is a \$2.05 tax rate. If the budget is reduced to get a \$2.05 tax rate with the incentive then Townshend would drop out of the hold harmless provision. Brookline and Newfane would lose the provision if the tax rate was dropped to \$1.98.

Mr. Claussen asked how much money is in the reserve fund? Mrs. Garland mentioned there is an unaudited amount of about \$572,000. The reserve fund can be used to bring down the tax rate but Mrs. Garland cautioned about using too much of the reserves because of the unknowns next year. Mr. Claussen asked how much of the reserve fund would need to be used to get down to a \$2.05 tax rate? Mrs. Garland calculated roughly about \$475,000 would need to be used.

Potential Additions

Mrs. Garland explained the \$2.21 tax rate is without any of these potential additions.

Programmatic requested included:

- Principal Roach – Requests .40 FTE increase in an academic support position - \$40,000

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- Principal Thibault – Requests the creation of an in-house Vermont Adult Learning VAL position to retain ADM - \$128,000

Mr. Thibault spoke how Leland and Gray have seen a number of students drop out this past fall. Because of this an idea of an in-house dropout prevention program was proposed. This program would be similar to an alternative ed program where Leland and Gray would still retain the students but not in a traditional school sense. The students would access learning on an as needed basis and develop project-based learning. Mrs. Chapman-Eaker commented in the budget committee meeting it was mentioned some of this requested money could potentially be covered under a grant fund. She asked Mrs. Garland if she has learned of any new available grants that could be used since the meeting last week? Mrs. Garland responded saying at this point she does not know of any but she is always looking for grants.

Mr. McFadden asked Mr. Thibault if this program was thought by a team or requested from students who previously dropped out? Mr. Thibault commented it was a team effort to brainstorm this but, in the past, students who regularly drop out often tell the administration they are going to interact with Vermont Adult Learning. In Mr. Thibault's experience very, few students are successful with VAL because of where it is located geographically. Mr. Thibault mentioned the break even for this new program is only 4 students.

Mrs. Bertram asked if this program could be utilized by students outside of Leland and Gray on a tuition basis? Mr. Thibault commented other districts most likely would not want to pay tuition to a public high school when they could access for free through school choice. Mrs. Chapman-Eaker asked if this program could be implemented as part of the flexible pathway work already being done? Mr. Thibault mentioned Terry who is in charge of the flexible pathways program has her plate full. However, she could be utilized on the administration end in the new program since she already coordinates with VAL.

Mr. McFadden tasked the administration with researching an age cap for counting a student as part of the ADM in an adult learning situation.

Mr. Roach explained his request for .40 FTE increase is in regards to future planning. Currently Townshend has 1.6 full time AST teachers and the addition .4 would get the school to 2 full time staff. Mrs. Bertram asked how the student/teacher ratio at Townshend compares to Jamaica or NewBrook? Mr. Roach mentioned the specialists are prorated for the number of students in the school. Mr. Foley commented this is not the ideal time to increase the number of staff because the number of students is dropping. Therefore, Mr. Foley asked if this request could be left on the table until we see how everything shakes out with the budget.

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Mrs. Garland broke down the potential additions for each school. The total amount of potential additions for each school requested is:

- Jamaica - \$58,969.00
- Leland and Gray - \$397,619.00
- NewBrook - \$284,125.00
- Townshend - \$260,244.00
- Combined total of \$1,168,957

As a request from the budget committee Mrs. Garland looked into securing a bond to cover the deferred maintenance to the buildings. The bond bank is not going to cover some repairs and maintenance that will not last as long as the 10-year loan. Mr. Medina is going to go back and look through the deferred maintenance list to determine what has a shelf life of the 10-year bond by the next board meeting. Mrs. Chapman-Eaker mentioned the towns would need to vote on whether to accept a bond. Mrs. Garland stated if \$1,000,000 bond was taken out then about \$100,000 plus a little interest would be added to the budget each year to pay off the bond.

Mr. Foley asked how the bond affects the per pupil exclusion? Mrs. Garland spoke if a \$1,000,000 bond was taken it wouldn't affect dramatically. The \$100,000 payment would be divided by the 512 equalized pupils.

Building Statistics

Mrs. Garland did not include any of the specials in the staff student ratios. The breakdown statistics for the schools are as follows:

NewBrook –

- Estimated K-5 ADM FY21 – 78
- Estimated K-5 ADM project FY22 – 95
- Personnel building costs - \$1,121,236
- Current staffing – student/teacher ratio is 12:1

Jamaica –

- Estimated K-5 ADM FY21 – 22
- Estimated K-5 ADM project FY22 – 22
- Personnel building costs - \$441,972
- Current staffing – student/teacher ratio of 11:1

Townshend -

- Estimated K-5 ADM FY21 – 100
- Estimated K-5 ADM project FY22 – 102
- Personnel building costs - \$1,167,894

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- Current staffing – student/teacher ratio of 10:1
Pre-K student/ teacher ratio of 7.25:1

Mrs. Chapman-Eaker asked if the school choice policy is the cause of Jamaica's student population to be significantly smaller than the rest of the elementary schools? Mrs. Garland mentioned Jamaica had 55 students before the merger and now has 22 students after the merger. Mr. West commented 17 students took advantage of school choice during the first year. Mr. Roach also pointed out the same year Jamaica lost 17 students was the same year the 6th grade moved to Leland and Gray.

1st Draft Budget by Function

Mr. West asked how it went on the food service part? Mrs. Garland spoke we did well at getting all the applications in but the revenues are still falling short. Revenues have been lost because Wardsboro is now doing their food through Dover and the Stratton Foundation program money is gone after the first-year investment. Mr. Foley asked if we can reapply to get the Stratton Foundation again? Mrs. Garland responded saying the Foundation invested in a pilot program and still helps the district in other aspects so she would not suggest asking for the money again.

Mrs. Chapman-Eaker asked if there are any teachers planning to retirement that are not accounted for? Mr. Anton replied saying the administration has not been informed of any pending retirements as of today.

Mr. Claussen spoke how he is in favor of trying to pursue a bond to cover some expenses. Also, there is the possibility to use some of the reserve fund to cover expenses as well. Mrs. Chapman-Eaker agreed with Mr. Claussen about covering some of the capital needs through a bond while being mindful of how long the structures are designed to last for based on the engineering information. Mrs. Chapman-Eaker advocated for a level fund from last year to this year considering the 1.46 increase in expenses but a 24% decrease in revenue.

Mr. West asked if the communication committee should put out this question to the public? Mr. Claussen commented the committee can put out a summary of the discussion and ideas on the table.

Mr. Thibault shared he learned about 75% of the increase at the state level for statewide assessment property tax is not based on ed spending. Mr. Claussen tasked the budget committee and administration to look at ways to get between a \$2.05 and \$2.10 tax rate. Mr. Anton asked if the board wants the two asks from Mr. Thibault and Mr. Roach in the 2nd draft of the budget? Mrs. Chapman-Eaker mentioned for clarity she would like to know what it would mean programmatically to the students if we were to level fund. The consensus from the board was to hold

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off on adding the 2 asks from Mr. Thibault and Mr. Roach until the budget committee can meet and discuss.

Mrs. Garland summarized she is going to come up with some scenarios where the administration is tasked with finding approximately \$479,000 of expenses. Also look at the deferred maintenance and what a bond would cost. She will look at adding some of the reserve fund balance in incremental amounts as well.

Old Business

HVAC Workflow Updates

Mr. Medina stated West River is about 90% complete from the original project scope. A meeting took place early last week with Alliance Mechanical and it was mentioned they are down about 8 individuals who are either in quarantine or currently sick. Because of this Mr. Medina applied for an extension to the grant deadline through Efficiency Vermont and it was approved. Alliance Mechanical is projecting to finish the remaining 10% of the project by the end of January.

Mr. Thibault asked if Leland and Gray should continue with the anticipated start date in January for the middle and high school knowing this work will not be completed until the end of January? The board decided to delay the start date until around February 8th in order to get the air quality test results completed.

Approve minutes of November 16th

Mrs. Chapman-Eaker made a motion to approve the minutes from November 16, 2020. Mr. McFadden second. The motion passed unanimously.

Student Reports

Ms. Hazelton commented there is not much to report but she hopes to return to in-person learning soon.

Principal Reports

Mr. Thibault highlighted a project done by the leadership program in conjunction with the Tri-M Honor Society that solicited gently used or new books to be donated. This program successfully delivered multiple sets of books to all 3 elementary schools. Mr. Thibault also mentioned some under used funds from the school sports program are being utilized to work on an RFP for the construction of an adventure course at Leland and Gray.

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Mr. Roach spoke about the plan to have students return to the building. On January 19th & 20th the students will return and will start with half days in order for students to get adjusted. About 91% of the students opted for in-person learning and everyone is excited to return to school.

Mrs. Bernardo thanked Mr. Thibault for highlighting the book drive and reported over 600 books were collected. Mrs. Bernardo highlighted the Stratton Foundation donated a sizable number of boots and winter clothing for families. Also, a new partnership with Neighborhood Connections was made who donated goodie bags for activities the children can do over the holidays.

Mr. Tabachnick thanked the central office for stepping up and helping out when an administrative assistant at NewBrook was out for a period of time. Because of the extra work the central office did NewBrook was able to continue daily activities seamlessly without interruption.

Superintendent Cabinet Report

Mr. Anton spoke the waiting study advocacy is getting some energy around our supervisory union. He expects the board to be asked in January whether we want to be part of the advocacy to the legislature once it is in session.

Communication Committee Update

Mrs. Chapman-Eaker mentioned the committee is going to be meeting on January 6th to square away plans of how to present the budget through the 3 different lenses.

Budget Committee Update

Mr. Winrich mentioned there is more work to be done on the budget so there is not much to update.

Approve Financials

Mrs. Garland suggested tabling this until next full board meeting.

Policy

Mr. Foley mentioned policies B3, B4, B5, B6, C1 and C4 were reviewed with no recommended changes. Two policies were pulled out because the administration

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was asked for some feedback but these policies will be presented at the next board meeting.

Executive Session

Mr. Foley made a motion to go into executive session for negotiations and personnel matters. Mr. Foley second. The motion passed unanimously.

Adjourn

Meeting adjourned at 9:47 P.M.

Next Meeting

- Budget Committee Meeting January 14, 2020
- Budget 2nd Draft - January 18, 2021