Windham Elementary School Board Meeting

March 9, 2020

Present: Bill Anton, Laurie Garland, Mickey Parker-Jennings, Beth McDonald, Antje Ruppert, Russ Cumming, Joyce Cumming, Kathy Scott, Kord Scott, Mary Boyer, Heath Boyer, Cindy Kehoe, Bob Kehoe, Dawn Bower, Bill Dunkel, Imme Maurath, Tom Widger, Bob Bingham, Gail Wyman, Paul Wyman, Carolyn Partridge

Meeting called to order at 4:03 pm

Bill Anton, Superintendent of the WCSU, chaired the opening asking for nominations for the Chair Person. Beth nominated Antje, elected unanimously. Antje then assumed the Chair and resumed the meeting asking for nominations for the Vice-Chair, nominating Beth, elected unanimously. Antje then nominated Russ as Clerk/Secretary, elected unanimously.

Reorganization of the board included authorization of all 3 board members to sign for the board, Brattleboro Reformer as Paper of Record, meeting times set for the 1st Monday of the month at the school unless otherwise warned, the Windham County Sheriff as the Truant Officer, Beth as the WCSU Policy Committee member, and Antje and Beth as the voting WES representatives at WCSU meetings. This concluded the reorganization of the School Board.

Antje took a brief moment to recognize and thank Carolyn for her many years of service to the community and the school board. She mentioned they have been to hell and back trying to manage the school budgets over the past 10 plus years. Antje presented Carolyn with a nice bouquet of flowers.

Beth made an impassioned plea for cooperation with the ad-hoc committee. She referenced Heath’s comments and review of his extensive spread sheet analysis illustrating the special education costs were not the sole cause for the cost increases. Her further comments about replacing people did not seem fair, and she was shocked and angry as well as disappointed with the events at Town Meeting.

Antje asked for approval of the minutes of March 2nd with an amendment, which was moved by Beth and Antje 2nd, approved.

Bills and pay orders were reviewed and briefly discussed, and Antje moved to approve POs 29- 35 with Beth as a 2nd, passed.

Comments from members of the Public:

A brief discussion ensued over recent school closings due to the Coronavirus 19 in Vermont area school districts. Bill Anton indicated he had spoken with the Sec. of Education and others concerning an issue with a West River Transportation employee who may be tested. As more information develops, appropriate plans will be made.

New Business:

Carolyn mentioned a modification to the proposed current school budget which would reduce the cost by a significant amount. The proposal involves not replacing a retiring teacher. Bill Anton discussed it with Mickey Parker-Jennings and both feel it is feasible to try. Sara Wunderle, administrative assistant and para-educator, will share the instructional work with Mickey. Professional development will be granted to Mickey to support his work in teaching grades K–3. Sara will also be provided professional development to assist in her role as para-educator. If additional instructional assistance is needed, Bill A. indicated that Supervisory Union employees would be used and grant monies would be applied to the costs. If the cost exceeded the grant funds application then the Town would be billed for the extra expense. Laurie is hopeful for grant funding to cover the cost of professional development.

A lengthy discussion involving the costs of the newly proposed state-wide health insurance plan revealed some informative points. The difference between and HRA and a HSA was discussed. Basically, the difference between a Heath Reimbursement Account (HRA) and a Health Savings Account (HSA) is that the unused funds from a HRA are returned to the school district at the end of the year, where in an HSA the unspent funds are carried forward into the next plan year for the employee. Laurie indicated that close to 90% of the employees choose the Family Gold plan. The out-of-pocket deductible is $5,000 and the HRA is funded to the $4,500- $4,200 level. The cost sharing between the district and the employee is on an 80% to 20% basis. These changes were coincident with the adoption of the ACA.

Significant time was spent discussing the various line items in the newly proposed school budget. A brief review of the Education Quality Standards by Bill A. indicated there were certain items that must be included and others that were optional. Several examples were discussed to clarify the differences. The Rural Education Achievement Program (REAP) was also discussed and Laurie indicated Windham may receive close to $15,000 for this next school year. The funds may be spent over a 27-month period of time.

The discussion of the newly proposed FY 21 school budget established an anticipated reduction of approximately $85,000 in expense. This reflects the elimination of a full-time teaching position and all related costs associated with that, position. Some line items, like # 45 Music Ed, are discretionary, where lines #’s 47, 49, 51, 53 are not discretionary. The proposed budget of $450,039 is reduced by $62,760 of offsetting revenues to a net budget of $387,263. The education spending per equalized pupil is reduced to $20,414 from $26,884 in the previously presented budget, which is just $1,658 over the excess spending limit. The resulting homestead tax rate is then estimated to be about $2.04 per one hundred of assessed value, a reduction from the $2.64 previously presented. This is a significant reduction from the budget proposed at the Town Meeting last Tuesday.

A brief discussion ensued where an estimated reduction of $31,500 could be considered to bring the per pupil cost below the excess spending threshold of $18,756. There seemed to be some room for discussion of various methods to achieve this reduction. One included spreading the deficit expense over a two-year or three-year period. That would involve borrowing the funds from a bank and making annual payments. Others would involve revisiting line items in the proposed budget. No specific action was taken as there is much to review and analyze before the next School Board meeting on March 16th at 4 pm at the school.

Beth moved to warn a meeting for March 16th, 2020 to approve the revised budget and Antje 2nd.

A motion to adjourn at 6:17pm was approved

Respectfully submitted,

Russ Cumming, Clerk