**Jan. 4 Windham Elementary School Board draft minutes with corrections**

**Present:** Beth McDonald, Russ Cumming, Carolyn Partridge, William Anton, Laurie Garland, Mickey Parker Jennings, Gail Wyman, Howard Ires, Eileen Widger, Bill Dunkel, Crystal Corriveau, Betsy Huffman, Jeff Rubin, Carolyn Rubin, Kermit Blackwood, All on Zoom.com

**Call to Order:** 4 PM

**Additions and Correction to Agenda:**

Carolyn asked to make a comment under new business about an inquiry to the Agency of Education.

**Minutes and Correspondence:**

Carolyn moved to approve the Dec. 7th minutes; Carolyn asked to amend the minutes with a paragraph concerning Russ’s comments at the November 16th meeting.  She read her comments in defense of the past School Board Minutes, stating they always met the statutory requirements for minutes. Russ commented that his critique was not that they did not meet the statutory requirements but rather they were so brief and did not record the actual discussions during the meetings. Russ agreed to amend the Dec. 7th minutes to reflect Carolyn’s comments.  Russ 2nd, motion passed.

Beth moved to approve the minutes for November 2, 2020, Russ 2nd; Carolyn abstained as she was not on the Board then, motion passed.

**Bills and Pay Orders:**

Beth moved to approve Pay Orders #1 to 10, Russ 2nd, motion passed.

**Public Comments:**

Beth asked for any comments. Kermit Blackwood inquired if the school is open several days a week, to which Beth replied yes, school is open Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, and Friday. Kermit found that remarkable.

**Principal’s Report:**

Mickey read his report which is attached to these minutes.   Carolyn commented that WES was one of a few schools that were able to meet full time. She referenced that Mickey had previously said that there was no reason why they could not meet on Wednesday as well. Carolyn pointed out the small class size and that they were all the same children on every day, so why not hold school on Wednesdays as well. She inquired of Bill if it would be a violation of the State’s policy. Bill indicated he had planned on consulting Mickey a few weeks after everyone was back in classes.  He wanted to be sure the cleaning protocols were being followed and Wednesday classes were definitely on the table for the second semester consideration.

Russ then inquired of Mickey concerning services that were purchased by the school from the Windham Central Supervisory Union, such as services like Physical Education, Social Work, School Nurse, etc. Russ asked if there was a written record of the receipt of the contracted services.  Mickey replied that he did not keep a log or record.  He stated that they just notice if they have not come and he would call and investigate. Russ then confirmed that there was no written record of receiving the services we had contracted to receive. A record for the Auditors to review is not kept.  Bill confirmed that time cards were not kept for onsite visits. Russ’s questions concerning contracted services resulted in confirming there is no written record kept at the school or Supervisory Union for the School Auditors to review to confirm that the contracted services have actually been delivered to WES

Russ’s second question for Mickey was concerning the documentation for diesel fuel usage for the school bus. Historically the records were kept at the school with the bus inspection sheets. Mickey noted that he would need to refer the question to Kord Scott, the school bus driver, to answer. Russ pointed out that there was a discrepancy between what was actually used and what was recorded as the “actual FY2020” usage. He estimated it may be in the thousands of dollars. Carolyn interjected that she had just had a conversation with Kathy Scott, the School Treasurer, about this issue. Carolyn noted that a recent request for reimbursement has been sent to the Supervisory Union for payment. Carolyn indicated it was in the eleven hundred dollar ($1100) range. Russ pointed out that the budget report indicated that in FY 2020 only $584 was billed. That represents fuel usage for the first half of FY 2020 school year (July – Dec. 2019). The balance for the current school year FY 2021 still needs to be determined.  Russ inquired if there was a paper record of the fuel usage for the FY 2020 that could be audited for accuracy.  Beth offered to speak to her father, Kord, the bus driver, to secure the information.

**Superintendent’s Report:**

Bill indicated his written report would be coming soon after this meeting. It is not attachable now.

**Old Business:**

Laurie Garland, the CFO of the WCSU, presented the third version of the FY 2022 budget. There were a few changes to the data points on estimated pre-K and ADM projections for FY 2022. Based on recent inquiries to parents, the ADM is expected to be 19 students.  A footnote to the data indicates that 4 students would not return if COVID was still an issue, and 3 may not come if there is no “after school program”, and one is on the fence depending on class sizes. The actual ADM for FY 2022 will be determined within the first 30 days of the 2022 school year.

Laurie moved to the page in the budget package that illustrates the anticipated tax rates for FY 2022. Based on reductions to several line items in the proposed budget the net result is a combined tax rate of about $1.78.  This rate reflects the tax rate for Pre-K to grade 6 at $1.09 and grades 7-12 at $0.64, for the proportion of projected Windham students in both elementary and secondary school enrollment.  The final rate will depend on the final West River Union School FY 2022 tax rate which has not been finalized as of this meeting.

Also impacting the tax rate is the change in the Common Level of Appraisal for this tax year. The FY 2021 CLA was 102.23 wherein FY 2022 it dropped to 97.83 a change of -4.40 which reflects a rise in the average value of prices for sales of real estate in Windham over the past 12 months. Also impacting the tax rate is the number of equalized pupils. The past ADM numbers were 2019 @ 23, 2020 @ 22, and 2021 @ 13.45 and since the Equalized Pupil count is the average of the past two years, it would normally be 17.73 EP’s for this budget cycle. The Hold Harmless provision allows us to use last year’s numbers so that 19.1 is the adjusted EP for this budget cycle.

Laurie also pointed out that it is still unclear how the ADM will be calculated in the ensuing years. No decision has been made as to the extension of the Hold Harmless provision for the 2023 budget cycle.  If it is not extended, then the ADM for Windham will drop with the average of 22+13.45 being 17 EP’s for 2023’s planning. That would result in a significant increase in the 2023 tax rates. Russ mentioned that he had projected a tax rate for 2023 using the actual ADM attendance for past years and a flat school budget, sans the Hold Harmless provisions, of $2.41 for 17 EP’s and $2.69 for 16 EP’s for 2023 taxes. This is only a projection and illustrates how important the ADM is to the tax rates.  Laurie agreed that these are very important numbers to consider in our planning.

After a brief discussion of items included in the Building Operations section of the budget and a discussion of finalizing the budget for inclusion in the Town’s annual report, the budget look complete.  Time lines were discussed for various motions to comply with mandated Secretary of State (SoS) rules for an Australian Ballot Town wide meeting.  Carolyn moved to approve the FY 2022 budget at $387,892.00, Russ 2nd, motion passed.

**New Business:**

Russ offered the motion:

 “To adopt Australian balloting for the Windham School District Annual Meeting and any other subsequent town wide school district meeting in 2021.” Carolyn 2nd Beth abstained, and motion passed.

Russ offered another motion:

 “To schedule a Special School Board meeting on January 25th at 4pm to warn the School District annual meeting by Australian ballot for March 2, 2021. Carolyn 2nd, motion passed.

Russ put forth one last motion:

 “To warn a School Directors and an informational meeting on the School Budget for Monday, March 1st at 4:30 pm Via Zoom.com.” Carolyn 2nd, motion passed.

Carolyn expressed her concern regarding an email that was sent to Jenny Prosser at the Agency of Education (AoE) by Russ.  Russ interjected that he had sent an email and that he was trying to get information.  Carolyn responded that what was disturbing about this was that he had blind-copied members of the community but not sent a copy to Beth or her.  Carolyn went on to quote from the email, which says “Some members of the school board and the community are proposing shifting some costs to the Town's budget.  Items like diesel fuel for the school bus, snow plowing and lawn cutting, electric and telephone costs, heating oil for the furnace and some other expenses as well.  They want to do this to reduce the per pupil costs for next year.  In doing so it would reduce the per pupil spending just a little below the excess spending limit. I feel this is not legal.” As someone who claims to have reviewed our past payorders carefully, Russ should know that the school has always paid for electric and telephone costs, heating oil, and lawn cutting.  In fact, years ago when we straightened out the school bus fuel situation it was pointed out that the school was paying for all the lawn mowing including the yard around the Town Clerk’s Office.  The town plow goes through the school driveway as it plows out the Clerk’s Office and if it came to that, could be considered an even trade for the lawn mowing that the school pays for.

Russ expressed concern that several times during the Dec. 7th meeting, items like this were brought up for discussion, but that Carolyn knew that such activities were illegal and did not speak up to say so at the time.  Carolyn said that she felt that when we are “blue skying” an issue that it isn’t productive to shut down the ideas of community members and that she encouraged community participation in the process.  Just because we’re discussing something doesn’t mean that we’re going to do it.  Carolyn feels that we need to create a safe space to explore ideas.  She also described what she called the “Vermont Way”, in that things that aren’t strictly legal happen, but there are ways we deal with them.  For instance, it’s illegal to put anything in our mailboxes that isn’t strictly US Mail, but it happens.  It isn’t legal to hang campaign signs on telephone poles but that happened in November here in town.

Russ also said in his email to Jenny Prosser, “There has also been a what I call a "behind the door" discussion of transferring ownership of the school building to the Town and having the Town's budget pay all cost associated with the operation of the building. Then rent the building back to the School for a much lower cost. I also believe this is not legal.”

 Carolyn addressed the issue of purchasing the school back when Act 46 and the forced mergers would impact the town’s ownership of the building. That was to protect the school and its assets. We didn’t have to do that because we won the vote and weren’t forcibly merged.  She noted that Grafton did own their school building but were required by Act 60 to charge the School district for all operational costs of the school.  If the Town of Windham was to have purchased the school and rented it back to the school district, we were aware that all operational and maintenance costs would have to be covered.

Carolyn expressed that what this comes down to for her is trust.  If Russ is going to send inquiry messages, blind copying community members that make accusations about alleged illegal activity without copying his fellow Board members, she finds that untrustworthy.

Carolyn wants the minutes to reflect that we would not do something that was illegal. Beth added that she agreed that when we are brainstorming an idea that we should be able to contribute without fear of being accused of doing something illegal.  She would have liked to have been included in that email.

Carolyn also raised her concern that Russ may have made incorrect statements in relation to the burden of expenses upon the less well-off taxpayers. She stated that his statements were incorrect.

**Adjourn**:  5:12pm

Respectfully submitted

Russ Cumming, Clerk

Attachments:

Principal’s report

Power point presentation of School tax calculations

The third version of the FY 2022 WES budget