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NORWICH BOARD OF SCHOOL DIRECTORS
BUDGET DELIBERATIONS
THURSDAY JANUARY 21, 2010
7:00 PM, MARION CROSS SCHOOL

Minutes

Present: Board members Addante, Callaghan, Day, and Odell; Administrators Gersen, Aubin, Roberts, Kelley; and 28 members of the public. Recorded by R. Lohr

1. Call to order – Chair Callaghan called the meeting to order at 7:06 PM.

2. Minutes

Linda Addante moved and Neil Odell seconded a motion to approve the regular meeting minutes of January 7, 2010 and the closed meeting of January 14, 2010 as submitted; and the special budget review meeting of January 14 as amended. The motion passed unanimously. The change to the January 14 minutes on item 4D, 2nd paragraph replace the word “decided” with “proposed.”

3. Chair Report

Chair Callaghan announced that the next regular Board meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, February 3, at 7:00 PM in the Marion Cross School Library.

There are three (3) Board seats that are open in March – two (2) for a three-year term (Callaghan and Odell) and one (1) for a two-year term (Day). Filings take place any time now until January 25, 2010. Candidates must present a petition with 35 signatures to the Norwich Town Clerk.

The Dresden School District has filing dates from Wednesday, January 13 through 5 PM on Friday, January 22. Filing for School District Officers can be done with either the School District Clerk, Deborah Carter, or at the SAU Office at 41 Lebanon Street, Suite 2 in Hanover. Positions open include Moderator, Clerk, and Treasurer for one-year terms; and one Auditor position for a three-year term.

4. Public Hearing on the proposed 2010-11 Budget

The public hearing was opened at 7:10 PM. Assistant Superintendent John Aubin gave a summary of the proposed budget and the most recent changes to the budget. There was \$198,739 of additional budget reductions and \$220,675 of additional revenue (transfers from Reserve Funds and special education reimbursements). An error was found in the expenses in the curriculum specialist benefit. The changes yielded a 4.78 decrease from the current year’s budget and the Dresden Assessment had declined to \$8,975,228. It is expected that the assessment will decline further at the next Dresden budget meeting.

The proposed budget tax rate is expected to be an increase of 11.72 percent, and the income sensitivity percentage would be a 2.65 percent increase and the non-residential tax rate would be a 7.94 percent increase.

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Principal Kelley discussed the impact of FTE cuts on the art and music programs, saying that a one tenth decrease in FTE in music, for example, could eliminate a class and instrumental lessons.

The school enrollment was discussed in terms of the influence of full-day kindergarten, which saw an increase of 10 students in the first year it was available. It was also stated that the Long Range Planning Committee is working to recommend program enhancements at Marion Cross and it is expected to report to the school board in April.

Town Manager Pete Webster announced that the town listers have appealed the common level of appraisal (CLA) and that it usually takes more than a month to get a response from the state. He estimated that for every point that the CLA rises, the tax rate would have a corresponding 1% drop. This would result in a savings of roughly \$100,000 from every CLA point. The listers are hoping for a 2-3 point increase but they do not expect to get a response in time for the school district meeting.

The issue of special needs students and the value of educational assistants in the classroom were discussed. It was felt that the decrease in the number of educational assistants would be a small amount of time for each classroom rather than elimination of any individual educational assistants. These assistants will be strategically deployed by the principal where needed. There was also discussion about using more volunteers.

Another suggestion included cutting the school year by a number of days or shortening days to save money. The Finance Committee affirmed its recommended guidelines (5 percent reduction in expenditures), and a comment was made about using reserve funds instead of reducing expenses. The Board asked the Finance Committee to support the proposed budget, which was more than a 4.7 percent decrease in spending from 2009-10 and only \$28,000 short of the 5 percent reduction guideline. The next Finance Committee meeting is scheduled for January 26.

The Board is hopeful that teacher contract negotiations will be completed before the school district meeting. The Board discussed the budget alternatives that are available if the contract is not completed before the vote. There was also a discussion about the possible use of Medicaid funds to underwrite the costs of ed assistants who were cut.

Board members gave opinions about the budget and balancing the quality of education and the taxpayer interests. The public hearing was then closed at 9:10 PM.

5. Business Requiring Action

Anne Day moved and Linda Addante seconded a motion to approve the 2010-11 budget in the amount of \$4,470,023, to be placed on the Warning and voted on at the March 2 Australian Balloting by Norwich voters. The motion passed unanimously.

The only change to the Warning was in the article regarding the Board salary amount, which was lowered to \$100.

Linda Addante moved and Neil Odell seconded a motion to approve the Norwich School District Warning Articles for the March 1 and 2 Annual School District Meeting, as attached to the original meeting minutes, and further to authorize the Administration to

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make whatever technical changes are necessary to ensure that the Warning is legal and that the intent of the School Directors is conveyed. The motion passed unanimously.

Linda Addante moved and Anne Day seconded a motion to approve the 2010-11 ARRA budget in the amount of \$95,344. The Board discussed the community perception of building a new playground that could be used equally by students with and without disabilities. It was suggested that ARRA funding could instead acquire additional teacher training for special education. The superintendent will consider other ideas for the ARRA grant funding and the ARRA budget will be resubmitted to the Board. After discussion the Board decided to table this motion.

6. Executive Session

Linda Addante moved and Neil Odell seconded a motion to enter executive session in accordance with Title 1, Section 313 for discussion of a personnel matter. The motion passed unanimously. The Board members entered executive session at 9:25.

7. Adjournment

Linda Addante moved and Anne Day seconded a motion to adjourn. The motion passed unanimously. The meeting adjourned at 10:05 PM.