

**New Hartford Public Schools
Board of Education Special Meeting
Antolini School – Library
March 31, 2023 @ 5:00 PM**

https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCX-ZlomWmjG81dc_QM3rfg

Present Chairman Karl Hermonat, Members: Travis Bonhomme, Tom Buzzi, Tim Klepps, Kelly O'Dell-Longhi (on Zoom), Penny Miller, Deirdre Tindall, Supt. of Schools Jeff Sousa.

Absent: Tony Persechino and Mary Stempien.

Chair to Open Meeting Chairman Hermonat opened the meeting at 5:02 pm with the Pledge of Allegiance.

Chair to Select Order of Business No changes

Board of Education Chair's Report

Chairman Hermonat said that recently he and Supt. of Schools Sousa had attended a Board of Finance meeting to present the proposed 5.19% increase in the 2023-2024 New Hartford School Budget. The Board of Finance requested that the Board of Education reduce their budget by \$90,000 for the coming year. Mr. Hermonat feels the budget is fair. Despite being a high increase, he feels it was warranted and fair. Mr. Bonhomme asked if we have any options about not cutting the \$90,000. Mr. Hermonat said we don't. The Board of Finance has ultimate authority as to what to set forth to the town. Mr. Bonhomme asked how Region 7 do what they want. Mr. Hermonat responded that Region 7 is set up differently. They have control over their budget financially. Mr. Bonhomme didn't think it was fair to ask the BOE to cut their budget.

Superintendent's Report

Mr. Sousa said the one item is to take budgetary action to cut \$90,000 from our budget. The Board of Finance directed us to cut \$90,000 from our budget. They looked carefully at our class sizes especially Grade 2. We added a kindergarten teacher because of the influx of students and that is the area of greater need. Currently there are 60 children enrolled for the coming school year. We also added a para to support this 4th section. This year there are 4 sections of 1st grade that will be going into 2nd grade next year. Mr. Sousa's recommendation is that we move forward with this change to save the \$90,000. The class sizes would go up to around 20 per class. Our average class size across the district would be 17.9.

MOTION by Mr. Hermonat to remove \$90,000 from the previously approved board budget by removing a second grade section for the 2023-24 fiscal year bringing the total second grade sections from 4 to 3. Second by Ms. Miller.

Mr. Hermonat said that currently there are 2 sections of Grade 2 in Bakerville and 2 sections in New Hartford Elementary. He asked Mr. Sousa how he would make that work. Mr. Sousa replied he will look at bus routes. The least impactful solution would be for about six New Hartford Elementary students to move to Bakerville.

Mr. Buzzi asked if the 30 students in Pre-K are paid students or half-paid. Mr. Sousa said a high number of them pay tuition. The percentage of paid students is between 70-80%. Special needs students come to the program free of charge. There is a sliding fee schedule for those that can't afford it or have financial hardships. This year about \$100,000 revenue will be generated by the end of the year. Ms.

Miller asked if we had looked at increasing our tuition. Mr. Sousa has looked at the other schools in our area and what they provide compared to what we provide. He is in discussions with the Director of Pupil Services to increase that amount. Mr. Bonhomme asked why we would want to increase. Mr. Sousa said we have been at this rate for quite a while. Other places are charging more than double. This is for the service we provide to get the children ready for school. The tuition doesn't cover the full cost of having a Pre-K.

Mr. Bonhomme asked if this money could be pulled out of the Capital budget. Mr. Sousa said that Capital is different from Operating Expenses and it can't be done.

Aye: Klepps, Buzzi, Hermonat, Tindall, Miller **Nay:** Bonhomme, O'Dell-Longhi

Motion passes

Mr. Sousa said another budgetary action for consideration for the board is that we had the surveyed the community about security. We had town residents provide us responses to adding security at our schools. Fifty-three percent said that they would like some security measure and 47% said no. We wanted to put this question before the May Referendum but there isn't time to do this. The question will be added to the Referendum scheduled for this fall. The other piece we have for discussion is to look for places in our budget that are non-instructional, non-impact and will not take away from our children. It would be a reservation of \$75,000 that the public has stated they are in favor of adding security. Mr. Sousa went through the budget and earmarked the following items: Painting \$30,000, Emergency Repairs (\$25,000), Window Cleaning \$3,000, CREC Membership (\$1,200), Superintendent's Line (\$2,750), Propane (\$2,000) and Enviromed in Capital (\$12,000) for a total of \$75,000. This non-instructional money will be set aside until after the vote at Referendum. There is a lot to get done before it goes to Referendum.

MOTION by Mr. Hermonat to hold \$75,000 of 2023-24 budget funds in line items identified by the Superintendent that will not impact students to cover the cost of one security guard position line item. Transferring and expending these funds in the new line item will be subject to the town referendum vote. Second by Ms. Miller.

Discussion followed. Mr. Hermonat commented that many people feel strongly about this. Mr. Bonhomme feels that we have a need in our schools for other things and does not understand why we are discussing security. Mr. Buzzi said he didn't want to cut the additional teacher but there are other needs.

Ms. O'Dell Longhi does not agree with the armed guards. She feels if someone wants to get in, they will. One guard will not do enough. We should use that money to beef up the security of the buildings. Mr. Klepps said as a sub-committee there are two different thoughts. One is arming the walls. The other is adding security. Once they are in – they are in. We have \$50,000 in Capital to start arming the walls. There are several grants that Superintendent Sousa is looking into. The armed guard is the deterrent.

Aye: Buzzi, O'Dell Longhi, Hermonat, Miller, Klepps, Tindall **Nay:** Bonhomme

Motion passes

Ms. O'Dell Longhi left the meeting.

Superintendent Sousa talked about the 5-year SPED historical budget costs. The number of identified students has increased over the years. The percentage of our identified students is in line with the other towns. We have gone from \$1.2 million to almost \$2 million for the 2023-2024 school year. Mr. Sousa will compile a report as to how we compare to other towns.

MOTION by Mr. Hermonat to put forth to the Board of Finance our revised budget with the reduction of \$90,000 for a total of \$9,418,090.32 which is a net increase of 4.12%. Second by Ms. Miller.

Aye: Buzzi, Hermonat, Miller, Klepps, Tindall **Nay:** Bonhomme

Motion passes

Routine Business

Approval of Minutes – March 21, 2023

MOTION by Ms. Miller to approve the Minutes of the March 21, 2023 meeting. Second by Ms. Tindall.

Unanimous

Expenditure Report

MOTION by Ms. Miller to approve the Expenditure Report. Second by Mr. Klepps

Unanimous

New Business

Mr. Hermonat said that he had received an email from Marissa Klepps regarding SROs. A copy of the letter is available for viewing in the Superintendent's Office.

Adjournment

MOTION by Mr. Hermonat to adjourn at 5:58 pm. Second by Mr. Buzzi.

Unanimous

Respectfully submitted, Penny Miller, Board Secretary
Attachment Marissa Klepps's email