

TOWN OF EPSOM
BUDGET COMMITTEE
DECEMBER 15, 2022

Attendees: Marylou Keane, Chairman; Joni Kitson, Vice Chairman; Gary Kitson, Water District Representative; Meadow Wysocki, Selectmen's Representative; Mary Frambach; Joyce Heck; Len Gilman; Linda Hodgdon; Penny Graham; Michael Muise, School Board Representative; Floyd Graham

Not in Attendance:

Other Attendees: Patrick Connors; Peter Warburton; Amber Wheeler; Michael Wiggett; Chad Decker; Jessica Bickford; Jerrica Vanslyvong

Marylou opened the meeting at 7:04 PM.

CONSERVATION COMMISSION

Chad Decker noted the Chairman has been out for health reasons and he will be doing the budget presentation. He noted the budget is the same as last year. He indicated they would like to do an updated map for the Town Forest. They also would like to complete work on the access road and expanding the parking lot in 2023.

Len asked the size of the Town Forest, Chad noted about 400 acres. Meadow noted in the Town Forest report the size is 657 acres with only 430 acres being accessible. Len asked if the Barton property had been added, it has been. Chad noted they are trying to do a foot trail to the summit of Fort Mountain. Len asked if they planned to add more property, Chad noted Epsom was not looking at any adjacent parcels. He noted that Deerfield may be looking at adding land on their side of the town line.

Meadow discussed the money coming out of the Conservation fund for the maps and road work. The Conservation Fund balances include: Conservation Fund (Timber Tax) \$95,942.90; Conservation Reserve Fund \$30,817.63; and the Land Conservation Fund \$43,279.45.

Joni noted that the 2022 remaining money has not been added to the funds. Meadow discussed how money was added to each fund.

SCHOOL BUDGET (the full binder was presented at the meeting)

Mr. Connors reviewed the information in the budget. He noted the following:

Line 23: Contracted Services are for children who need additional services.

Line 34 – Tuition to Other Districts - The figure is based on the actual number of students attending Pembroke Academy.

Page 38 – Ms. Wheeler will be sending a revised sheet as some of the numbers have been revised. (This deals with the number of students).

Line 86 - Mr. Connors noted that there are about 45 students in the band. There has been an increased interest in the band from prior years.

Line 100 – TEACHER SALARIES – This is for the teachers who assist students with special needs with increases due to CBA.

Line 101- AIDE SALARIES – This line is for the aides to also assist those students.

Line 146 – 2123 ASSESSMENT - Mr. Connors noted this is for children they currently have diagnosed with special needs. There are no additional funds in the budget if an additional child moves in the district. Mr. Connors noted there are funds in the Trust Fund if they have an additional student that can be used.

Mr. Connors noted the teacher contract is up for negotiation this year. They are in the third-year of the existing contract.

Line 214 – TRAVEL AND CONFERENCE – This line was included as part of the bargaining agreement for the teachers. Meadow noted no funds were expended in 21-22, and the line has an additional \$400.00 added for this year. Mr. Connors noted they have a math consultant that they would like to continue to work with.

SAU BUDGET

Linda noted that there is not a default budget included for this budget. Ms. Wheeler noted that the towns have default budgets, but the SAU does not have a default budget. Gary noted that then they should not be part of the school budget.

Gary discussed that as a part of the SB 2 the SAU budget should have a default budget. Mr. Wiggett asked what the RSA was that indicated that. To successfully pull out of the SAU budget, he noted that all the towns have to vote for the separate SAU budget.

Linda asked who is Epsom's representative to the SAU school board. Mr. Wiggett noted he was. Linda asked if he was concerned with the SAU budget. He said he was not concerned as it was divided by the five towns. Linda asked what he used for comparison purposes so that we know that Epsom is paying a fair rate. He did not answer.

Meadow noted that the Committee is looking at one of the salaries having a 13% increase, asking the rationale for the increases.

Floyd noted that there are two discussions – the SAU budget being separate from the school budget. The other topic is what if one of the towns should pull out of the SAU and creating their own SAU.

Joni asked the number of employees at the SAU – Ms. Wheeler noted 15 employees currently and they are looking to have an additional employee for a total of 16.

Gary reviewed the RSA regarding the SAU budget. Gary noted that the SAU budget is separate a separate budget and could be presented that way. Mr. Wiggett noted this does not take effect unless all 5 towns in the SAU vote for this.

Mary asked who the 5 people were that voted on the SAU budget. Mr. Wiggett noted they voted on the budget and then the 5 school boards meet together and vote on the SAU budget (23 members). It was asked if all of Epsom's School Board members attended and voted, Mr. Wiggett indicated no. Joni clarified that 23 members have the opportunity to make the decision on the budget.

Gary asked if they looked at the surrounding SAU's regarding salaries, etc. The discussion continued. Ms. Wheeler noted information is available for superintendents, business administrators and assistants through the State DOE website.

Linda asked if other SAUs have 2 superintendents and no assistant superintendent. Mr. Warburton said no it was not common, but the SAU was a special case. Ms. Wheeler noted that the work is substantial for the 5 districts and that is why there are 2 superintendents rather than one. Mr. Warburton noted there is a lot of information available and if a small group wanted to meet separately with him, he would explain what everyone at the SAU does. He would like to have people come and talk about the SAU. He noted they are all there for the education of the children.

Len asked when is enough money enough money. He noted last year after the budget was presented and passed there was an additional \$20,000.00 was added to the SAU budget that was not discussed with the Budget Committee.

Gary noted when the Town gives the budget to the committee it becomes the Budget Committee's budget. Ms. Wheeler noted that most employees do not have contracts. Ms. Wheeler discussed how salary increases are determined. Raises are generally done in May. There is a line item in the SAU budget for raises and then they also pull from a separate pool.

Floyd noted that the committee is trying to be educated as to the process of determining the SAU budget and that it isn't helpful when they won't answer our questions because we then wonder if they are hiding something.

Mr. Warburton noted that this is the last year he will be here as he is retiring. He noted that how the SAU works is a hard thing to explain. Len noted that this is a large amount of money and the committee should be meeting more than once to review and discuss it. He discussed the issues with the way the SAU determines their budget. Ms. Wheeler discussed that the SAU board meetings are open to the public.

Gary noted that the committee asked for information regarding the school and SAU budgets in August and it was received on December 9. We get information from the town then so are very puzzled as to why the school information is not available for many months despite repeated requests. Ms. Wheeler noted they do not give anything out that the School Board has not seen. Floyd asked if the School Board could ask for the SAU Budget quarterly, etc.

Len asked if the year ends June 30, why can't the committee get a budget of expenses on a YTD basis even if it isn't final. Ms. Wheeler noted that there have been issues the past two years with COVID and personnel changes in completing the budget. This committee is very frustrated in the lack of information that is available from the SAU that goes back several years.

It was discussed the Committee is asking for a draft and they would be aware the expenses are not finalized. Mike confirmed that the Committee is asking for something to look at so not

everything is having to be reviewed at the end of the year. It could simply be marked draft or preliminary.

Joni noted that this Committee asks a lot of questions. Floyd noted that the Committee looks at all the department budgets. Marylou noted that everyone has to understand that the budget given is a draft. Mike noted that we understand that it is a draft.

Floyd discussed that remaining funds can be rolled over and not returned to the towns. He asked the amount in the fund; Ms. Wheeler discussed the money used for various items to offset budget items. Floyd asked the maximum to be held in the undesignated fund. Ms. Wheeler discussed the fund with no response as to the amount. She noted that they never use the funds without SAU Board approval.

Discussion on the SAU Budget was completed and the Committee returned to reviewing the School Budget.

Line 323 – OTHER REPAIRS TO BUILDINGS - Meadow noted that there was a large overage in repair costs for 2021-2022. Mr. Connors noted that there are expenses that they do at the end of the year if there are surplus funds.

Line 337- CONTRACTED SERVICES – Mr. Connors noted the expense and Marylou confirmed there was an e-mail sent regarding this.

Line 350 - Ms. Wheeler noted the cost of transportation is exorbitant. She noted the costs for transportation for homeless or other students that are not special education.

Mr. Connors discussed other transportation. Transportation for athletic events was discussed.

Line 377 - Ms. Wheeler noted the retirement costs have decreased for the next year and she discussed the rate decreases.

Line 399 – TRANSFER TO FOOD SERVICE – Ms. Wheeler noted the food service costs and in the past couple of years the State and Federal Governments have provided additional funds for this line. She noted that next year's budget is offset by the \$39,000 surplus.

Ms. Wheeler noted there is a great deal of information in the binder and if people have questions to please let her know. She had completed a School District Comparative to the SAU Budget Process and Functions and a Special Education Services by Budget Line.

Linda asked about the tax rate (Page 39) estimations. Ms. Wheeler noted the tax rate history (Page 35) and the surplus history (Page 37).

Ms. Wheeler noted if members had questions to e-mail them to her and she will respond. Ms. Wheeler noted the Warrant Articles. (Page 43)

Marylou asked if the School/SAU would like to return on January 3, 5, or 10. Marylou noted the public hearing would be January 12. They will return on January 5.

Gary asked if they had a plan for the surplus money left in the budget at the end of the year. Mr. Connors noted there are things the Board will look at and determine if they should be repaired or replaced.

Len asked if there have been preparations for an active shooter in the school. Mr. Connors discussed what the school has in preparation and safety.

Meadow asked if they have a proposal for the \$28,000.00 in the safety grant funds they received in October. Mr. Connors noted the items they would be implementing. Mr. Connors thanked the Epsom Bible Church who partners with the school in an emergency.

Penny asked why on the Warrant Articles the School Board did not show how they voted and what the tax rate impact would be for the default budget. She asked for the same information be added for the school budget. Ms. Wheeler indicated that she could add the information.

Linda asked the total number of students in the 5 districts. Ms. Wheeler noted about 2,000 students with about 800 employees, Linda noted there are 2,812 students. Joni noted the student population may decrease with the needs increasing.

Meadow had a copy of the Merrimack County budget that she will send out to the committee.

Gary noted when he asked about the Police and Fire increases why did Jerrica have to research as they should have had the information when the increases were determined. Meadow will see what she has for information.

Linda did not know how to interpret the Fire Chief's hours; Jerrica noted his salary is based on 20 hours.

WATER DISTRICT

Gary noted the expenses are until November 30. He discussed the electricity increase for next year.

Gary discussed the tests they have to complete this year for the wells.

Materials – Have spent 7200 for chemicals.

The office expenses include mailings for billings.

They have changed operators with the costs reduced. If something extra is required the cost is extra. The district does more so they do not have to pay expenses.

They have paid the tank Re-Hab and only pay for the Service Agreement.

The balance of the Water System Update Fund is approximately \$72,000.00.

Gary discussed the Late Fees and that they encourage people to pay the bills on time.

Linda asked the number of households on the system, approximately 320 accounts. Floyd asked if commercial fees were the same as a household, they are.

The water rate increased from 7.5 cents to 8.5 cents. Floyd asked how the rate is determined. Gary noted the district sets the rate.

Len asked the number of hydrants, Gary noted about 32. Gary noted the Town pays the rent as the district does not need the hydrants.

Gary discussed the State, through the Exxon – Mobile settlement, paying for the water line expansion crossing the Suncook River on Route 4 due to the MBTE pollution at the traffic circle.

It was determined that the final budget information will be presented on January 5th.

Marylou discussed presentations for next meeting.

Meadow motioned to adjourn; Mike seconded the motion. The motion passed.

Marylou adjourned the meeting at 9:40 P.M.

Respectfully,

Betsy Bosiak
Recording Secretary