

A Special Meeting of the Regional School District 14 Board of Education was held on Thursday, June 14, 2012 at Nonnewaug High School, 5 Minortown Road, Woodbury, Connecticut.

Present: Superintendent Jody Ian Goeler; Board members John Chapman, Maryanne Van Aken, John Swendsen Gary Suslavich and Pamela Zmek; Administrators Andrew O'Brien, Melinda McKenna, MaryLou Torre, Kim Culkin, Eric Bergeron, Bill Nemece, Jose Martinez and Jeff Turner; Assistant to the Finance Director Helen Stewart; and Board Clerk Debra Carlton

Absent: Board members Charles Cosgriff, George Bauer and Sophieazane Bartlett

Audience included: Region 14 faculty and staff members, including but not limited to Judy Perrucci, Kate McKeon, Alicia Lombard, Debbie Massimin, John Dominello, Maggie Gildea, Katie Yocis, Sharon Gomes, Melissa Colby, Arlene Campbell, Sherry Hallenbeck, Joyce Brazauskas, Nancy Ayre, and Shelly Stone; two members of the press and about thirty additional members of the community

I. Call to Order

Mr. Chapman called the meeting to order at 6:06 p.m. and led the Pledge of Allegiance

II. Discussion of 2012-13 Budget/Reductions

Mr. Goeler provided possible budget reductions, explaining an alternative to the curriculum director utilizing an existing administrator. The level of work, he said, would be less but at least some progress could be made. He said the first three items on the reduction list were the only ones he could support, bringing the budget to a 1.17% increase over last year.

Discussion followed.

Mr. Swendsen asked about the miscellaneous \$30,000. Mr. Suslavich believes areas such as degree status changes, printing, advertising, travel/conference, and repair of maintenance vehicles are over-budgeted.

Mr. Swendsen supports the 1.17% without the curriculum coordinator. Any lower, he said, would have serious consequences.

Questions were answered about effects of the loss of the pre-k teacher, possibility that the music foundation would continue to fund strings, and the cost to run football.

III. Privilege of the Floor

Pam Gengenbach, Woodbury, asked if all line items were considered and was told they were. She suggested further discussion on pay to participate, as well as having families contribute financially to the strings program.

Scott Baider, Woodbury, asked what amount of time the high school administrator would do curriculum work. He also stated that many people value the curriculum position; while all budgeted items matter, there is much support for this position.

John Dominello, Woodbury, believes all taxpayers are entitled to their opinions; however, it is irresponsible to make a statement like "vote no until the budget is 0%" without knowing what is in danger of being cut. He feels it irresponsible to add the agriscience program into the discussion when the resolutions lie at the state level. If taxpayers are upset about this issue, he suggests they contact their legislators. He then detailed some of the many ways students give back to this community and beyond, through charity work and community outreach events. He detailed some of the character building activities in which students participate and predicted that if the budget went to 0%, many of these activities would go away. He noted the \$100,000 in support from the NGC for football and felt it is a shame if the community does not want to support the students and these programs.

William Drakeley, Woodbury, Finance Chair for Woodbury, said their backs were against that wall and so the mill rate has been set at 22.58 representing a .15 mill increase. It is unfortunate that the agriscience program is only spoken of at budget time, and hoped members of the finance board will be asked to join the committee being formed.

Katie Yocis, Woodbury, asked that the board reconsider the elementary positions. In the same way as things taken out of budgets are hard to ever get back, such as the music teacher lost at the high school and the enrichment program at the elementary level, raising class sizes will become the norm and will never come back down, she feared.

Nancy Grazing, Woodbury, feels conversation is not happening around projections of where we are going to be in a few years out, with regard to declining enrollment, and how the requests in the budget reflect that. The district, she said, needs to manage resources; and, she realizes it is painful to have to shrink.

Bill Dreska, Woodbury, asked how effective the district is in acquiring outside funding relative to other districts, as well as in acquiring discounts, and was told we are average in this area.

T.J. Meyer, Southbury and captain of the NHS Chiefs football team, came to NHS for agriscience but is as proud to play football for Nonnewaug as he would have been to play for PHS, a school that has no problem keeping its team going. Football is important to him and he hopes it stays in the budget.

Brian Bowyer, captain of the NHS Chiefs football team, said football is important to him, too. The program has grown and the team is improving, he said.

Mike Paniccia, captain of the NHS Chiefs football team, said football has been a huge part of his life for 10 years and he wants the kids coming up to have the same chance he did, even if the team isn't that good, it's been a great opportunity.

Will Mosher, captain of the NHS Chiefs football team, has been with the team from the start and it means the world to him. He said you can't put a price on what athletics provides to students.

Caroline Bossetti, Woodbury, recalled that reconfiguration came about because budgets would never pass and feels people with children in the schools vote yes for budgets, and the others vote no. She recommended interaction between the schools and senior citizens to unite those two groups.

Candace Fernandes, Woodbury, wanted to clarify that many senior citizens support our budgets and allow signs to be placed in their yards in support. She asked that the board address the relationship between declining enrollment and increased budgets to clarify if there is a direct correlation between the two.

Jean Carnese, Woodbury, opposes the new administrator and believes it was a firestorm for those who also voted no. Addressing an earlier point, she believes once a new administrator is added, we never lose it. Teachers wrote curriculum when she taught. She will vote no until that position is removed.

Deb DeSorbo, Woodbury, noted that much has changed since we were in school; increased class sizes will be a detriment; huge challenges are coming and we are starting below par; there is no benefit to taking money out and trying to go back to the way things used to be; if the superintendent says it's needed, that is good enough for her; without clubs and activities we don't really have a school system; she agrees that insisting on a 0% without knowing what is in the budget is wrong.

Art McNally, Woodbury, complained that only parents were notified by email about this meeting. The community has asked for a reduced budget due to declining enrollment and have not been heard. The preschool was brought in with stimulus money and now that money is gone and the preschool is still in house. He suggested going back to the teachers who got 12% increases over three years. He suggested purchasing curriculum. He said the board was asked twice to remove the curriculum position and did not listen.

June 14, 2012

Roberta Zulpa, Woodbury, agreed the curriculum position has become a sticking point and she would not be in favor of cutting 2 teachers to keep an administrator. She suggested revisiting the idea in a few years.

Alex DeSorbo, Woodbury, asked if the board had considered whether eliminating two teachers would violate class size guidelines; if so, he would insist the policy first be changed to allow for this.

Roberta Stewart, Southbury, and a football mom, noted that extra-curricular activities and sports build character. Without programs and enrichment experiences, she would predict more and more students will run to private schools.

IV. Revision of 2012-13 Budget

Further discussion followed. Mr. Chapman noted that the changes coming from the State will create upheaval; the challenges are right in front of us and are significant. Not a lot was done this year and he would hate to see another year without progress in terms of curriculum work. The board listens to its constituents but is bound to deliver education to all students equally.

Board members, in turn, identified items on the proposed reductions list they could or could not support cutting.

Ms. Stewart provided percentage increases and dollar amounts associated with various budget options.

Following discussion of the many options available, the following motion was entered.

Ms. Van Aken entered a motion to present a budget to the towns of \$30,437,674 representing a 0.63% increase over last year's budget. Seconded by Ms. Swendsen, the **motion carried 5-0**.

Eliminated from the budget were a 0.5 FTE science teacher at NHS, the curriculum position, misc. reductions totally \$60,000, a 0.5 FTE preschool teacher, a 1.0 FTE school psychologist, and one bus. Retained in the budget were 2.0 FTE elementary teachers, a 1.0 FTE English teacher at WMS, a 0.4 FTE music teacher, and \$35,000 in the athletic budget.

V. Set the Date for Budget Referendum

(the meeting was prematurely adjourned before setting the date for referendum. Motion to adjourn was withdrawn)

Mr. Chapman requested a *motion to hold a district meeting on Monday, June 25, 2012 at 7:00 pm, with the referendum on the 2012-13 budget to be held on Tuesday, June 26, 2012*. Entered by Mr. Suslavich and seconded by Mr. Swendsen, the **motion carried 5-0**.

VI. Adjournment

Mr. Chapman requested a *motion to adjourn*, entered by Ms. Van Aken, seconded by Mr. Swendsen.

Motion carried 5-0.

The Special Board of Education meeting adjourned at 8:20 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

John E. Chapman, Secretary
Regional School District 14 Board of Education

Recorded and filed subject to Board of Education approval by: Debra W. Carlton, Board Clerk, 6/15/12