

Southern Berkshire Regional School District
Finance Sub-committee meeting of May 10, 2017
Sheffield, MA

Members in attendance: Art Batacchi, Jr, Marcella Bush, David Hastings, Fran Lartigue, Christine Regan, Dennis Sears

Also present: Genis Melendez-Delaney, Robert Law, Carl Stewart

Dennis Sears called the meeting to order at 5:50pm.

Motion:

Art Batacchi made a motion to approve the minutes from the previous meeting, the motion was seconded by Marcella Bush, all in favor.

Dennis Sears discussed how we want to get input from towns on how to structure the bond – UniBank. Mr. Sears contacted all chairs from the finance committees of the five towns regarding this issue. We now have a Bond Anticipation Note.

Review of Budget Status:

Mr. Sears explained that we now have a failed budget. He handed out the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education document and we reviewed the highlights. Mr. Sears explained the process of resubmitting a budget.

Christine Regan handed out a Timeline For Actions After Rejection of Annual Budget document.

Vito Valentini asked if both Egremont and Monterey both need to approve a new budget or does only one town need to? Discussion also ensued regarding the “condition” that New Marlboro put on their vote.

Mr. Sears then explained the process of what will happen if the budget does not pass. There was conversation regarding the process of the state taking over the SBRSD budget. Mr. Sears stated that it is in our best interest to resolve the matter and avoid the state taking over.

Pending Litigation with the Town of Egremont:

Carl Stewart discussed the pending litigation involving the SBRSD and the Town of Egremont. It was noted that sufficient legal fees have not been allocated in the budget – only a line item allocation - which would be exceeded should this case go into litigation. It was discussed that this would require the SBRSD to increase the budget as it now stands. It was noted that legal fees could exceed \$250,000.

Mr. Sears asked Christine Regan if she saw any other ways to decrease the budget and to note the impact of such reductions.

Ms. Regan suggested two ways of cutting the budget:

The first was a staff reduction through Title 1 and Title 2A Grants
Title 1 would be a reduction in supplemental services and Title 2A would be a decrease in support and training (professional development).
The second suggestion was to share services with Berkshire Hills -- possibly combining food services and/or building and grounds.

It was also noted that SBRSD has signed a net meter contract, which gives SBRSD credits on electric bills. This is through Clarksburg Solar. Ms. Regan explained how the credits work and stated there is a possible \$12,000 credit per year.

Mr. Sears asked Ms. Regan about the impact of a possible new national health care plan. She stated it would be a significant impact in terms of Medicaid reimbursement from the special needs children. In 2016 SBRSD received \$200,000 reimbursement – a change could mean a 25% reduction.

Ms. Regan stated her concern over reducing E & D too much.
\$500,000 has been applied to this year's budget. Conversation ensued regarding this.

Fran Lartigue asked about administrative salaries and suggested giving only cost of living raises. Conversation ensued regarding the salaries of the administration. Ms. Lartigue noted that administration raises are significant and suggested that a freeze on administrative salaries be put in place. She also explained the Union A contract raises.

Christine Regan was asked to provide an overview of administrative salaries and their increases over the last few years, position by position.

Motion:

Ms. Lartigue stated: "I move that we task Christine Regan to run an administrative analysis of salaries."

Art Batacchi amended the motion by stated that he would also like to see what the cost savings would be if raises were frozen.

Ms. Lartigue seconded the motion

All in favor

Mr. Sears asked for audience feedback.

Conversation ensued

Vito Valentini stated the budget is a good one and that it failed because of the year-long suspension of the Egremont School. He recommended that the superintendent conduct a survey of students grade eligible for the Egremont school and ask if they would go there. If there are 12 or so, then it could be a functioning school.

Ms. Lartigue stated that she took the minutes of the March 5, 2017 Finance Committee meeting – she read a section of her minutes aloud. In doing so, she noted

that the “further conversation” (regarding the Egremont school) that was to occur as was stated in the minutes, never did occur.

She discussed what a year-long suspension of the program at Egremont would look like and also suggested reaching out to Egremont families to ask what kind of program might work in the Egremont School – she suggested child care or a tech program as examples.

Conversation continued regarding the Egremont School. Mr. Batacchi stated that reinstating the school would affect the budge and the bus contract.

Mr. Sears asked the committee if we want to make a recommendation to the entire school committee, to which Ms. Lartigue made a motion.

Motion:

Ms. Lartigue stated, “I move that we put forth the existing and exact budget with the understanding that there will be opportunity to have open discussion on the issue (Egremont Schol) at the SBRSD meeting of May 25, 2107.”

Mr. Batacchi seconded the motion.

Motion:

Ms. Lartigue moved to adjourn. Marcella Bush seconded.

Mr. Sears adjourned the meeting at 7:10 pm

Minutes taken by Marcella Bush