

**MINUTES OF MEETING
MUNICIPAL BUDGET COMMITTEE
January 16, 2008**

A meeting of the Municipal Budget Committee was called to order at 6:30 PM in the Meeting Room at the Conway Town Hall with the following members present: Chairperson Melissa Stacey, Robert Drinkhall, Pat Libby, Phil Dighello, Karen Umberger, Doug Swett, John Edgerton, George Fredette, Betty Boucher, Bill Aughton, Bill Jones, Rick Paquette and James LeFebvre. Also present were Maureen Soraghan, Dr. Carl Nelson, Bob Gadowski and Mike DiGregorio.

Chairman Stacey advised that the ZBA had cancelled its meeting for next Wednesday (1/23) so we will meet at the Town Hall and not at the Rec Center at 6:30 PM. Chairman further advised that Crow would not be present and she was under the impression that Mark Hounsell would be here in his place. Chairman further stated that on the non-profit Petitions, all but 2 came in; have a total of 12 and have tentatively scheduled from 9:00 AM until 2:30 PM on February 2nd or on February 9th as a snow date, basically the same as last year with lunch.

Rick Paquette stated that he would like to have the Tax Collector present a status of Revenue, whether seeing a dip or have the same amount of money as last year. Chairman Stacey asked if he wanted Rhoda or Tom and Rick stated it was up to Earl Sires or the Selectmen who should speak with us.

Chairman Stacey gave a friendly reminder to keep conversations civil, wait to be recognized by the Chair, remember to keep all side conversations to a minimum and keep the rustling of paper to a minimum.

SCHOOL REVIEW

Dr. Nelson stated the School Board did not meet on Monday, but are meeting tomorrow to approve the Default Budget and will bring it in next week. Dr. Nelson advised that he had passed out a packet with Karen's questions which he had answered and that he understood the Committee had just received them and had not had time to review. He further stated that he had passed out a packet from Jim Hill with answers to the questions Jim had been asked. The key note speaker tonight is Maureen Soraghan, Director of Special Education Services.

Bill Jones questioned why the Default Budget was not approved yet and Dr. Nelson stated it should be approved tomorrow. Bill asked when would this Committee be getting it and Dr. Nelson stated as soon as it is approved and he could have it at Town Hall to be picked up. Bill stated it could wait until Wednesday.

Maureen Soraghan stated it was obvious to her that this Committee had done their homework; answers to questions submitted by Karen are on the pink sheet in the packet and there was another pink sheet with pictures

that she would go over. If you remember from last year, Unit 2 District-wide was not in an increase situation. This year up 26.49%; increase deals with real people with real disabilities. We use our best techniques to give an accurate account, best judgment. Remember we are dealing with real people; things can be different in 24 hours. The law mandates that we must educate students with disabilities in the least restrictive environment which may include being in regular education classrooms, having a therapist, a hearing specialist, anything a student needs short of physician services depending on the disability; do have a nurse that deals with just one student. The biggest increase in the Special Education budget is for tuition of \$180,800.00, majority of that money is to educate our preschool children. We are obligated to educate from age 3 to 21 years unless they receive a High School Diploma; do subsidize private preschools here. There has been a big increase in needs for preschoolers. The philosophy is that if you help early, maybe things will lessen as that student goes through the grades; it really is early intervention.

Rick Paquette stated that at some point he wanted to know how much was reimbursable and Maureen Soraghan stated she would get to that.

Maureen Soraghan stated the second largest increase is the Extended School Year. We are obligated to provide education to students after school, during the summer, vacations. Special Education students do attend these programs.

Bill Jones asked if they attend school and are physically in the building and Maureen Soraghan stated absolutely; they have a restricted location for the Extended School Year Program. Bill asked if it included busing and transportation and Maureen stated yes. Bill asked about the hours and Maureen stated from 9:00 AM to 2:00 PM. Bill asked if they were all Special Education students and Maureen stated only students deemed to be eligible. Bill asked about funding and Maureen stated the Conway School District pays. Bill asked if this was funded by the taxpayer and Maureen stated yes, it is mandated.

Jim LeFebvre asked what number or percentage was in the 16 to 21 years of age and Maureen Soraghan stated that Karen had actually asked about students aging out of the District. They have two students who are in that setting where that need to be educated to 21; no one aged out this year; previous year two students aged out; only budget until students are 21. Northern Human Services takes over at 21.

Bob Drinkhall asked who determines the needs and what exactly transpires if needs are not met. Maureen Soraghan stated the State comes in for a compliance audit. State is the Department of Education who is checking up on us. Bob asked what transpires if you don't meet the requirements and Maureen stated a parent files a complaint and could possibly take to a Due Process Hearing. Chairman Stacey stated if a School does not comply, they can lose funding. Maureen stated yes, funding is taken away.

Karen Umberger asked if the Extended School Year was only for elementary students and Maureen Soraghan stated no, all grade levels. Middle School

and High School have the Extended School Year as well. Karen asked if that was in another place and Maureen stated it would be in their budget. Karen stated she didn't see it, but would look further.

Bill Jones asked if the student attains a certain age, do they come out of the program and Maureen Soraghan stated at age of 21. The State has a program through Northern Human Services; Northern then provides services for students.

Jim LeFebvre asked how do you define success in your program and Maureen Soraghan stated defined by progress. We maintain for each student quarterly progress reports on IEP goals. Teachers let the parents know if the goal has been met and may be a new goal is needed.

Bill Jones asked if the students are mostly in a regular classroom, does it cause problems for children not in the program. Maureen Soraghan stated it is actually a benefit if you have teachers teaching at all levels; students have the benefit of experienced educators. Bill asked whether it handicapped the other children and Maureen stated there have been situations when a student with an emotional disability can be disruptive.

Chairman Stacey asked about the difference between an IEP and a 504. Maureen Soraghan stated students with an IEP are Special Education students. A 504 may be another type of disability; may have visual discretion problems, difficultly reading, may have a handicap but don't have special needs. There is a difference in funding, the federal government gives money for a coded child, not for those with specialized instruction.

Maureen Soraghan proceeded by stating 213 Conway students and 23 preschool students added another increase because of performance increases and insurance at \$81,000.00; do place students out of District and bring them back when we can; returning students to Middle School requires hiring aides. These students have been restrictive and need to transition. Funding from the Federal Government of \$362,000.00; promise to pay 40% to share with Albany, Chatham and Eaton, Hart's Location.

Jim LeFebvre asked of the 213 students, how many are from Conway and Maureen Soraghan stated that is Conway only. Jim asked how many fall under federal assistance and Maureen stated all of them.

Bill Jones asked on the salary increase, how many people are Special Education staffing and Maureen Soraghan stated she would have to look it up and get the information to him.

Rick Paquette asked if the federal government mandates and doesn't fund at zero percent, what do schools do and Maureen Soraghan stated there have been towns that have applied for emergency aid to provide services. What happens is that regular education services get cut or fees get charged; that is what other towns have done. Rick asked if there was a precedent if we say we are not doing this increase. Dr. Nelson stated you are answering as if falling short. Rick asked if mandate the Town of

Conway to do this and they don't fund them, what is the taxpayer left with and Maureen stated lawsuits. Dr. Nelson stated if services are not provided, parents have the right to go to Due Process and sue the School District. Rick stated then you are not aware of any circumstances where a town stated can't do and Maureen stated she was aware of one town that did not have the money to pay. Dr. Nelson stated he didn't know of any and that the only thing to do is to go back to the taxpayer.

Betty Boucher asked how many private preschools in the District and Maureen Soraghan stated 14 places; we do get federal money for every 3 year old coded student; however, there is no where near enough money so Conway School District subsidizes. Betty asked who decides how much each gets and Maureen stated each 14 has a different tuition structure; also children have different needs; some require two mornings and some require 5 days; it is up to the IEP. Betty requested a list of every preschool.

Karen Umberger asked about a Grant that was talked about that was different than normal federal funds and Maureen Soraghan stated it was called IDEIA. Karen asked if it was a separate Grant and Maureen stated \$362,000.00 to share with the other towns.

Bill Jones stated this is important coverage that the taxpayer is getting from the TV and not from the newspaper; very disturbed about this; turn volume up as loud as you can. There is a federal mandate to provide services with funds not forthcoming. Question came if a School District had ever gone bankrupt; they don't, but a lot of Mr. and Mrs. Smith's are. We are being raped.

Maureen Soraghan stated she knew that the Conway School Board was attempting to get more funding. George Fredette stated they haven't had a lot of success.

Jim LeFebvre stated it was mentioned that pre-K receives a small percentage of cost; overall what is a preschool paid. Maureen Soraghan stated \$800.00 per student per school; some could have a student 5 days a week and pay \$15,000.00 per year. Jim stated he would like to see the bottom line; would like to see the differential.

Rick Paquette stated unfunded federal mandate at 15%; how about other programs like No Child Left Behind; percentage of funding. Dr. Nelson stated have Class Size Reduction money. Bob Gadomski stated \$25,000.00 to \$50,000.00; Class Size Reduction \$90,000.00. Rick stated right now 10% being funded of total and that he loves this program; has seen very positive results with mainstreaming. Bob stated it was very difficult to figure out the exact cost with so many requirements; very difficult to give a figure; have two Elementary Schools at \$25,000.00 each; Class Size Reduction in the vicinity of \$90,000.00. No Child Left Behind law is so complicated, it is hard to estimate a figure. George Fredette stated every teacher adjusts their program to meet the requirements.

Phil Dighello stated he was getting his car repaired last year and was reading Time magazine; there was a big section concerning funding of \$.09

on the dollar from last year; was an interesting article; \$.09 on the dollar.

Doug Swett asked if it was mandated for Kindergarten across the state. Chairman Stacey stated the whole Special Education is being done over again; new laws.

Bob Drinkhall asked if it was known how this District compares to other Districts in percentage of Special Education students. Maureen Soraghan stated the numbers are average or below. Some towns have high percentages; we are definitely in the average or below average. High School is below average, but the Elementary Schools have a pretty high percentage overall. It is in the Report Card.

Maureen Soraghan stated that they were very fortunate in New Hampshire to have Catastrophic Aid funding; this is a fund that after we pay up to the cap, they will give money back or reimburse us; but it depends on how many people have tapped in as to how much we get. In addition, Medicaid does reimburse us for any student that is Medicaid eligible. Chairman Stacey asked if they only bill Medicaid and Maureen stated only for Medicaid eligible. Jim LeFebvre asked what the cap is and Dr. Nelson stated 3-1/2 times the State average. Maureen stated we will get that to you. Jim stated when applying for Catastrophic Aid you get a percentage back and Maureen stated yes, but you have to pay up front. Jim stated in Conway, let's say a student needs a full-time nurse, what do you anticipate getting reimbursed and Maureen stated one-third, only get a percentage above cap.

Karen Umberger stated she thought Carl had mentioned that in this current year 12 new aides had been hired because of additional students. Maureen Soraghan stated it can happen any time during the school year. Several students require assistance that are not in the budget, they will move in during the year or come in September and it might take awhile to identify their needs. Maureen further stated that everyone should look at her answer to question #5 on the pink sheet. Karen asked when do you identify and Maureen stated must have in place by the third birthday; we are identifying all year long. Maureen stated parents bring their children to screenings and some will receive an IEP if it is determined they do have needs.

Rick Paquette stated on the 15% reimbursement, is that number more or less than what it was 5 years ago and Maureen Soraghan stated more. Rick stated how long and Maureen stated more than 20 years old.

John Edgerton questioned if every 3 year old was tested and Maureen Soraghan stated no; children can be brought to you during Child Find or calls with concerns from someone, anyone can make a referral, but the parents must consent.

Rick Paquette asked how long has mainstreaming been going on and Maureen Soraghan stated they have been mainstreaming for at least 10 years.

Karen Umberger stated she had a question dealing with the Perkins Grant; what is the Perkins Grant used for. Dr. Nelson stated the stipend positions for programs, equipment, a set amount of money to start clubs. Karen stated she thought it was \$90,000.00 and Dr. Nelson stated that is correct. Karen stated she was curious as to what improvements were made in the Career/Technical area with the Perkins Grant. Dr. Nelson stated he would bring a copy of the Grant to the next meeting. Karen asked if the SAU had a grant writer and Dr. Nelson stated they had a part-time person who works two days a week for grant writing; was director of Project Succeed. Karen asked if it was an SAU position and Dr. Nelson stated it was.

Pat Libby congratulated Dr. Nelson on his recent award received from the State of New Hampshire. Dr. Nelson stated a lot of other people made it possible.

Karen Umberger stated she couldn't come to grips with the cost of the curriculum for the District. Bob Gadomski stated since it changes consistently, could be anywhere between \$20,000.00 and \$50,000.00 for text books; at the High School level it is difficult to give an exact figure.

Jim LeFebvre stated that he was unable to be at the meeting last week with Jim Hill and requested a copy of the binder presented. Chairman Stacey stated Bill Jones and Bill Aughton would need one also.

Rick Paquette stated he was trying to understand the numbers; in 2003 - 1,363 students; in 2004 - 946 students. Dr. Nelson stated that is the year we split the Middle School and the High School.

Chairman Stacey stated for clarification purposes, are Special Education students counted twice and Maureen Soraghan stated students are listed by grade and should not be counted twice. Chairman asked Maureen whether the State Regs (the yellow book) for Special Education had come out and if she could get a copy. Maureen stated that they had not come out yet, but when they were out, anyone could get a copy from her.

OTHER BUSINESS

Rick Paquette stated he liked turning up the volume; strikes him that our federal government continues to raise taxes, but are not going to give you any money; that is federal taxes coming out of the taxpayer pocket; not going to fund it; taxpayers need to begin turning up the volume, call the senators and congressmen. This is a federal tax; in his life, it is a tax.

John Edgerton stated they have passed unfunded bills for the past 30 years; they don't care, they make the laws. A comedienne stated it right: all the presidential candidates are promising you everything; they can't deliver anything.

Chairman Stacey stated she did call the Conway Sun and after leaving a message, was told the primaries are taking up too much time; not enough

reporters to cover, but will make every effort. Bill Jones stated he stood with Tom Eastman recently and complained about not getting coverage; people are not getting the information. Bill met the new reporter and spoke with him and he stated that he did not know when the meetings were. Chairman stated The Sun was e-mailed, faxed, hand delivered and mailed the schedule of meetings for this Committee. She found it incredibly amazing that they did not miss a single meeting last year. They reported that the two Boards would never act like adults and play well together in the same sandbox; now that we are playing well together, where are they. Bill Jones stated it is so important to get the message out there and get the information to the taxpayer. We are going to get hit pretty heavy.

Doug Swett suggested a Warrant Article that this Committee get paid \$5,000.00 per year. Chairman Stacey stated as much as she would like that, can not do as they would then become employees of the Town.

Bill Jones moved, seconded by Betty Boucher, to adjourn the meeting at 7:40 PM. Motion carried unanimously.

Respectfully Submitted,

Iris A. Bowden, Recording Secretary