

TOWN OF WISCASSET
BUDGET COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES
July 10, 2008

The meeting was called to order at 6:32 PM at the Wiscasset Municipal Building

Budget committee members in attendance: Chairman Steve Mehrl, Judith Colby, Sherri Dunbar, Pamela Dunning, Judy Flanagan, and Richard Hanson. Members absent were George Greene and Tony True.

In attendance from the Wiscasset School Department were Board Member Gene Stover, Middle School principal Linda Bleile, and Primary School principal Cheryl McKeagney.

Judith Colby moved to approve the agenda. Motion was seconded by Richard Hanson. Motion passed 6-0.

Steve Mehrl moved to approve the minutes for the July 7 2008 meeting. Motion was seconded by Judith Colby. Spelling of the word principal was corrected. Minutes were approved as amended 6-0.

Steve Mehrl moved to approve the minutes for the July 8, 2008 meeting. Motion was seconded by Judith Colby. The minutes were edited to reflect that Judy Flanagan had moved the question on the Recreation and Parks Department. Minutes were approved as amended 6-0.

Under old business, Chair Steve Mehrl took the opportunity to speak on several topics.

Steve Mehrl announced that he had built a mail list that included all committee members to ensure that all email correspondence goes to all members.

Steve Mehrl talked about the school board meeting he had attended earlier in the day and how it had cleared up some confusion on his part. He found it a good meeting with good discussions. He commended the work done by the school administrators and the school board.

Steve Mehrl talked about the budget for the previous school year. Budget Committee had cut \$445,000 from the budget and the school department still had a \$375,000 balance forward. If viewed as a \$9,000,000 corporation, this is not an unreasonable amount.

There was some discussion about the hardships endured by many to pay their tax bills. Specific mention was made of the elderly on fixed incomes and young families who are just starting out in life.

There was a discussion about building better relationships between the boards and reducing the negativity in town toward the school department. At this point there was

mention concerning having the boards to compromise and agree on amounts so a budget will have a better chance of passing.

There was some discussion about whether the school department is top heavy in administration. This is a topic that many people have voiced to different budget committee members and was evidenced as their opinion when they voted to lower administration in the school's last year. Linda Bleile pointed out that the schools actually only have 4.5 administrators: 1 superintendent, ½ assistant superintendent, and 3 principals. The additional people who meet to set the budget are department heads, not administrators. It is important that we are all more careful in our terminology in speaking about these positions as they have several times been referred to as administrative positions.

There was discussion about the need for a curriculum coordinator. It is believed by most that this is not a necessary position to replace. In many school departments of this size, the superintendent coordinates the curriculum. It may be a desired position, but is it truly needed. It was brought to the committee's attention that the person who has filled this role performs many other duties. She has done data assessment, taken care of required federal and state forms, and has written and administered several grants.

At this point, it was realized that we had neglected to introduce ourselves that some people in the room may not know everyone else. Introductions were given to clarify positions.

Wiscasset Middle School Principal, Linda Bleile cleared up a misunderstanding about the time commitment she would have as the president of the Maine Principals Association. It had been stated to committee members that she would be gone 2 days a week for this position. Linda stated that the bulk of her commitment would take place over summer vacation. She would have about 11 days that she would need to attend to association business during the school years and 5 or 6 of those would be half days away. She was very careful to look onto the impact of this position before she accepted it.

Wiscasset Middle School Principal, Linda Bleile and Wiscasset Primary School Principal, Cheryl McKeagney spoke about the impact of having 1 principal to administer the Middle and Primary schools. Linda Bleile spoke about the number of duties that fill her days at school. She stated that she usually starts her day around 7 am and is at school until around 5:30 pm. She is also at the school 3 to 4 evenings a week when programs are running. Her job is about 50% curriculum and 50% management. She takes home work every night in paperwork, email information and/or phone calls. Cheryl McKeagney spoke about a big part of the job of a principal is safety. She stated that it is very time consuming just being sure that all of the children and adults in the building belong there and are safe. She has put in up to 14 hours a day. Linda Bleile said that the biggest thing about 1 principal covering 2 schools is that one is never in the right school when a crisis occurs. It is detrimental to the students to not have a principal in house to attend to crises as they arise. She also stated the opinion that it is not fair to educators to expect them to step in and cover for an administrator on a regular basis.

The question was raised as to whether the school department had an organizational chart that would show the levels of employees in each facility. It would be very helpful to have such a chart show the number of administrators, educators, maintenance, etc., for each building and cost center. It was thought that this type of chart would better show the public how the school department functions.

There was some discussion about the impact of closing the 5th-6th grade wing at the middle school, which has the largest and newest classrooms in the building. Linda Bleile stated that having the 5th and 6th grades together works well. She and Cheryl McKeagney were in agreement that the 5th grade would not fit as well with the primary school students and that the 6th grade would not fit well with the 7th and 8th grades. Some of the reasons that the move would not be practical are as follows: There is no staff available for the summer to physically move the classrooms. Special Education classes would be moved into the class rooms in the basement that have mold problems that need to be address for health reasons. Health and Guidance teachers would not have their own classrooms. They would become nomadic and move from room to room. This would make it difficult for them to remain organized and could waste a lot of their time. Finally, the town is still paying a bond that was taken out to repair this wing. Both principals stated that they would rather give up other items to keep the wing open. Linda Bleile mentioned her principal's budget for course work, buying new textbooks to replace very old ones and giving up purchasing materials as alternatives to closing the wing.

There was a discussion about the grant money the school receives. Grant money does not show up in the regular budget. It funds things like expeditionary learning, after school programs, and special education .It was pointed out that federal grant money is drying up and the schools will receive less next year. There is also a reduction is the amount from the state for EPS.

School Board member Gene Stover stated the opinion that the superintendant would not have time to take on the curriculum coordination. He is being kept to busy with the regionalization at this point. A discussion followed as top whether the school board would look at the position of curriculum coordinator as a possible cut if the budget committee should so vote. Gene Stover said that he would certainly look at whatever is voted when making his decisions.

There was a discussion about having 1 nurse for the school department. It was pointed out that there are many medical concerns that require medical staff. There are students in the school system who have diabetes, asthma, cancer, and special needs who really need to have a nurse available. Currently the high and middle schools share a nurse and there is 1 nurse at the primary school full time.

There was discussion that the original proposal for a school budget this year was \$9,920,647. the current request is for \$9,388,890. That is a reduction of \$531,757. With raises in salary and pay, raises in the costs of petroleum products and the rise in the cost of living last year, this is thought by some to be a very reasonable amount.

There was discussion about the projected \$375,000 balance forward and how it can be used. The balance forward remains part of the budget and used to reduce the amount that is raised through taxation for the next budget year.

There was a brief discussion about whether the school board could use surplus money from tuition and insurance. Judy Flanagan had a old letter from past superintendent Wayne Dorr that address those issues. He stated in his letter that those monies could be added to the balance forward.

There was discussion about finding an opinion that could be brought to the open town meeting.

Steve Mehrl moved to visit article 14 that pertains to the amount the town will vote to raise and appropriate over EPS. Sherri Dunbar seconded the motion.

Pamela Dunning made the motion that there be a 5 minute break as the meeting was running late. Motion was seconded by Judith Colby. Motion passed 6-0.

Meeting reconvened from the break at 8:40 pm.

Richard Hanson moved to amend the amount in article 14 to \$1,316,529, a reduction of \$300,000. Motion was seconded by Judith Colby. Discussion ensued that this amount would essentially remove the bulk of the balance forward amount from the budget. There was some stated concerns that the cut was too high. There was also some concerns about coming to an amount the public would pass. Motion to amend was voted and failed 2-4. There were many concerns voiced that there was fear that the budget would not pass. Steve Mehrl moved to amend article 14 to \$1,551,440, a reduction of \$65,089. That would lower the amount of the total budget to \$9,323,801. Motion was seconded by Judy Flanagan. Motion passed 4-2, the article was amended. Steve Mehrl moved article 14 as amended. Motion was seconded by Pamela Dunning. Motion passed 4-2.

Judy Flanagan voiced concerns that some corrections to the minutes were being done by email and she felt that this work should take place at the meetings. It was discussed that it might be possible to talk about the corrections via email but that the work of amending and accepting minutes would be done at the meetings. Clerk Pamela Dunning will still be emailing first draft copies of the minutes to the committee members to enable them to have plenty of time to study them before the next meeting.

Having no further business, Judy Flanagan moved to adjourn. Motion was seconded by Sherri Dunbar Motion passed 6-0. Meeting closed at 9:47 PM.

Respectfully submitted by Pamela Dunning