



COLCHESTER, VT.
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**TOWN OF COLCHESTER
ANNUAL SCHOOL MEETING MINUTES**

COLCHESTER HIGH SCHOOL AUDITORIUM
February 29, 2016

Moderator Jerry Flanagan reconvened the meeting at 6:33 p.m. The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

In attendance were Larry Waters, Superintendent; George Trieb, Business /Operations Manager; Carrie Lutz, Director of Special Education; Gwen Carmolli, Director of Curriculum; Amy Minor, Colchester High School Principal; Julie Benay, Malletts Bay School Principal; Chris Antonicci, Union Memorial School Principal; Carolyn Millham, Porters Point School Principal. School Board members in attendance were Mike Rogers, Chair; Curt Taylor; Lindsey Cox; and Craig Kieny.

ARTICLE 1

To choose a moderator, if elected moderator is not present.

Elected moderator, Jerry Flanagan, was present. No action was required.

ARTICLE 2

To act upon the reports of the School District Officers.

MOTION was made by Dirk Reith and SECONDED by Roger Burand to adopt Article 2. There was no discussion.

VOTING: The Ayes carried the Motion. Article 2 was passed.

ARTICLE 3

To set compensation, if any, to be paid to the School Board Directors.

MOTION was made by Dick Pecor and SECONDED by Henry Kopek to set compensation for the School Board members at \$1,300 each. There was no discussion.

VOTING: The Ayes carried the Motion. Article 12 was passed.

ARTICLE 4

To determine whether the District will vote to authorize the School Directors to borrow money for current and necessary expenses by issuance of notes not in excess of anticipated revenue for this school year.

MOTION was made by Dirk Reith and SECONDED by Henry Kopek to adopt Article 4 as read. There was no discussion.

VOTING: The Ayes carried the Motion. Article 13 was passed.

ARTICLE 5

To transact any other business proper to come before said meeting.

Larry Waters began the review of the School Budget with an explanation of Act 46, relating to education funding, spending and governance. It was designed to promote equity in education across the state, maximize efficiencies, promote transparency and contain costs. The Act was amended for FY 2017 and repealed for FY 2018. Colchester's (per pupil) spending was low compared to the rest of the state and was exempt from Act 46.

FY 16 cost per student spending is \$13,535 per year. Much of the increase proposed in this year's budget was due to (salary, compensation and increased insurance costs. Class sizes and student-teacher ratios were discussed.

Act 166, Universal PreKindergarten is now mandatory for districts to offer but optional for parents to enroll their children. Parents also have the option to send their children to a private daycare with a PreK program. Whether private or public, there is a tax credit of \$3,000 for enrollment to their providers. The PreK program provides Colchester School District with \$500,000 in revenue, which includes State funding. There are 63 children in the PreK program at Malletts Bay School, with a 15-17:1 student-teacher ratio. 160 children attend private PreK programs.

A resident asked if parents received the tax credit if they did not enroll their children in PreK. The answer was no, they do not.

The FY 2017 budget calls for a 3.6% increase (The budget increased by 4.10% but the education funds needed increased by 3.60%. They are different) over FY 2016. The primary drivers were increases in compensation and benefits, which are mandated by union contracts. There has been a reduction of the amount of Federal funding, also. There were shortfalls in the area of special education. There is a plan to eliminate support staff paraeducators (I think you should state "reduce the number of SS positions" and not eliminate) and to hire more Special Education teachers to co-teach with class room teachers.

Julie Smith explained the difference between Paraeducators and Special Education teachers.

Q: Janice Scaralate commented that she is a teacher in another school district and they use the co-teaching model and she supports the idea

There was also a shortfall in athletic funding.

Q: Bob Patti asked how retirement was funded.

A: The school does not pay teachers' retirement, but funds support staff at a percentage of their salaries. The State controls teacher pensions.

Q: A resident asked about one-on-one paraeducators.

A: Paras providing 1:1 support will not be eliminated.

Q: Tim Stetson asked how many paras were being eliminated.

A: There are still 100 paraeducators left.

Q: Bill Miller asked how many students are in Special Education.

A: 13% of total enrollment or 350 students. 22% of the school budget goes to Special Education.

George Trieb discussed revenue and the \$800,000 surplus that is factored into the budget for FY 2017; (these are two very different issues) \$730,000 was left from building the new Science Lab and the rest was savings from not filling some open positions and some one-time revenue that came in. The surplus can't be held back for future funding.

Q: Cheryl Hart asked why can't the surplus be held back.

A: It is not allowable by school law.

Q: Tom Pendergrast asked about the history of budget surpluses.

A: They vary greatly. They have ranged from as little as \$17,000 to \$50,000 last year, to \$800,000 this year.

Q: Bob Patti asked if not being able to save back surpluses simply encourages spending.

A: Not necessarily in Colchester but other schools may have so little revenue that they have expenses for every surplus dollar. Not sure what this means.

Q: Kristy Brown asked if the Special Education positions that were not filled are still open.

A: The need for hires is flexible and turnover means they are hiring all the time.

Q: Curt Taylor asked about State funding for Special Education.

A: The State reimburses districts directly for most expenditures at approximately 50-60% per dollar. Districts that send students to Colchester are required to pay 100%. Students who live in other towns and attend Colchester schools are reimbursed at 100%.

Larry Waters recapped the budget. And noted that health insurance had risen 8%.

Q: Joey Purvis asked about levels of insurance plans for teachers.

A: The teacher's insurance does not use the level model, but it would be considered a "Cadillac" or Platinum plan, and that is for teachers State-wide.

Q: Bob Patti asked if insurance was put out to bid.

A: Yes, but not every year. The teachers' contracts stipulate they get BlueCross/Blue Shield.

Q: Bob Pendergrast asked what the district contribution was to teacher insurance.

A: The district pays 80%.

Q: Bob Patti asked what was included in the budget calculation for per student cost?

A: All expenditures are totaled, revenue is subtracted and the remainder is divided by the number of equalized pupils.

Q: A resident asked about projections for student enrollment.

A: Enrollment has leveled off.

Q: Maria Hopstedt asked how Colchester compares to other towns for number of students receiving free and reduced lunch.

A: About 30% of Colchester students are eligible. Burlington and Winooski have a higher percentage.

A discussion of proposed Theater renovations ensued. Over the last 20 years, the only renovations have been to reupholster the seats and to purchase a new sound board. A renovated space would create revenue from rentals by the community. Right now lighting and sound is being outsourced to local companies. If Article 8 does not pass the surplus from the Science Lab must be used to pay down the bond principle. It is a low interest bond and would decrease the tax rate by only one cent for only two years. Waiting to renovate would mean taking out another bond or borrowing to cover the cost.

Q: Tom Pendergrast asked why the theater? Why not another project?

A: Re-roofing, new cafeteria equipment and the theater were the proposed project. It was decided the theater would be the best use of the funds.

Q: Tom Pendergrast said he wanted a multiple choice vote.

A: The response was that this was not practical.

Q: A resident asked how much of the bond principle had been paid.

A: None.

Q: Bob Magoon commented that the stage lights are "ready to blow" and the audience lights are not dimmable.

Q: Dirk Reith asked the age of the theater and if there were safety concerns about the old equipment.

A: The theater was built in the 70s and some of the fixtures were purchased from a company that had gone out of business in the late 60s. The fixtures are so old they can't be repaired any more. There are definitely safety concerns.

There was a discussion of revenue from rental of the theater to various community organizations.

Q: Tim Stetson noted that he had worked backstage and the lighting is inadequate and renovation is necessary.

Q: Kevin Marchand asked what the school paid for the Science Lab bond.

A: It was \$3,500 and the school paid for it. The total amount of the bond was \$5,000,000.

Q: Wendy Simpers asked about the condition of the seating in the theater.

A: The seats are (40 years old)15 years old and are beginning to rust.

Q: Bob Magoon thanked the school for the work they did creating the budget.

Q: Dirk Reith said he supports the renovation of the theater.

Renovation would include lights, sound system, new curtains, updating the acoustic, new paint, carpet, and A/C. It was noted that theater renovations have been on the district's to-do list for 10 years.

Q: Bob Magoon asked why the air exchange in the theater had not been turned on for the Town Meeting.

A: It failed a few years ago.

Curt Taylor reminded the audience that after the voters approve the use of the surplus, the final decisions on any renovations costing greater than \$15,000 would be subject to the School Board's approval.

There was no further discussion.

ARTICLE 6

To adjourn said School District meeting and to reconvene at the Colchester High School, Laker Lane, in said Town on Tuesday, March 1, 2016, for voters in District 9-1 and 9-2 to vote for Town Officers and to transact any other business involving voting by Australian ballot with voting to begin at 7:00 a.m. and to close at 7:00 p.m.

Motion was made by Dirk Reith and SECONDED by Dick Pecor to adopt Article 6 as read.

VOTING: The Ayes carried the Motion. Article 6 was passed.

Moderator Flanagan adjourned the meeting at 8:09 p.m.

ARTICLE 7

Shall the voters of the school district approve the school board to expend \$37,914,750, which is the amount the school board has determined to be necessary for the ensuing fiscal year? It is estimated that the proposed budget, if approved, will result in education spending of \$13,297.47 per equalized pupil. This projected spending per equalized pupil is 1.75% lower than spending for the current year.

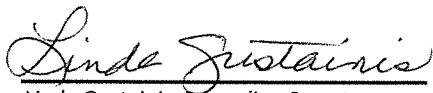
ARTICLE 8

Shall the remaining balance of the bonds authorized for the completed science project in an amount not to exceed \$730,000 be allocated for the purpose of renovating the school theater?

If in favor of the bond issue, make a cross (x) in this square ☐.

If opposed to the bond issue, make a cross (x) in this square ☐.

Respectfully Submitted,


Linda Gustainis, Recording Secretary


Karen Richard, Town Clerk


Jerry Flanagan, Moderator