

Sunapee School Board Budget Meeting Minutes

Sunapee Middle High School Media Center
December 6, 2008

Call to Order: Meeting was resumed from a recess following a continued meeting at 9:04am.

Roll Call:

Budget Advisory Committee Members

Spec Bowers
Scott Unsworth
Charlie Smith – arrived 9:08

School Board Members

Shaun Carroll- Chair
Judy Trow- Vice Chair
Ed Bailey
Kimberly Denney
Hershel Strickland- arrived 9:28

Brendan Minnihan- Superintendent

Others Present:

Sean Moynihan- SMHS Principal
Alan Pullman- SCES Principal- 9:07
Dorie Shaw- Co Sp. Ed. Director
Terra Geere- Co Sp. Ed. Director
Mike Trojano- Business Administrator
Kelly Cornish- Financial Services Mgr.
Mike Montore
Wayne Palmer- Buildings & Grounds
Samantha Bailey- School Clerk

Public Forum:

Charlotte Brown, who previously served on School Board and Budget Advisory Committee wished that the School Board would keep the budget as level funded as possible considering the tough economic times. She stated a 4% increase to taxes is too much for this economy, especially for those community members on fixed incomes. Brendan Minnihan commented that the tough economic times are being recognized, however there is still a duty to provide for our students. The goal will be to find a balance between these two concerns.

Introduction to Overall Budget:

Mike Trojano summarized the major things that have changed and those of interest. Some of the causes of increase include a 3.1% (~\$300,000) teacher salary increase. All salaries are per agreement or agreed upon by the Board. Another highlight was the rise in energy costs, up by \$59,000. Retirement contributions are up as well, as required by law. Brendan Minnihan commented that teachers still contribute 5% to the retirement, which means the employers are forced to increase their contribution. Judy Trow mentioned that years ago the state borrowed money from the retirement fund and never replaced it, passing the deficit to local communities. Mike Trojano reported that health insurance increases were minimal, to which Trow responded that this was one of the benefits of leaving SAU 43, because as our own SAU the health history is better. Minnihan commented that we have one of the lowest rates in the state.

As part of his presentation, Trojano presented a pie graph showing the objects that make up the budget. Salaries made up the highest percentage by far. Charlie Smith asked if there was any flexibility in the salaries and Shaun Carroll pointed out that salaries are mostly three year

contracts with teachers, including a give and take of insurance and salary. Smith brought up the tough times of the economy mentioning that everyone must contribute, not only the tax payers. Trow reminded everyone that the starting salaries of teachers completing a four year degree are low and they must also pay into their own benefits. It was looked up that the starting salary of a teacher is \$31,962 as of this year. Support staff makes between \$8 and \$16 per hour (Trow). Smith stated he wasn't implying that cuts had to be made but to take it into consideration for the sake of the tax payers.

A revenue handout was passed out and briefly discussed. The overall estimated impact results in an increased tax rate of 4.5 % not including warrant articles, as compared to this years operating budget. At 9:40 Trojano was dismissed and meeting continued.

Special Education Budget Presentation:

The major changes in this area were mentioned, including reduction of one case manager and one paraprofessional, starting a new preschool program, and increasing the Special Education directors from .4 FTE to .6 FTE. Sean Moynihan reported that in creating the budget, they were as responsible as possible in regards to the economic times. Historically, cut backs have been looked at and this year an opportunity for cut backs without compromising students is possible, creating big savings.

SMHS Special Education

Dorie Shaw spoke for SMHS Special Education. She reported current statistics and explained the current law including one component, known as RTI (Response to Intervention) where students are assisted as they begin to fall behind without requiring coding which wouldn't happen until a student was at a failing point for a certain period of time. When interventions occur as a student begins to fall behind they wouldn't need to be identified for special services, the goal being to get them up to grade level before they need to be identified for special service. This was brought up as there are currently 28 students in this category in addition to those being served in the MHS. Shaw continued, stating the average case load for each case manager this year is 10 students. Next year, by eliminating one, the average would be 13 per case manager, still at the low end of average's of the state.

Kim Denney asked to clarify that the regular education staff is responsible for the RTI, not special education. Shaw explained that this is true, however regular ed. still looks to special ed. for interventions especially in the area of reading. Denney asked if regular education teachers are being trained and how they are contributing. Moynihan explained that RTI is one duty that teachers may assist with during their non-teaching period, instead of some other duties like lunch duty or study hall supervision. An example was given where a student was referred to special ed. but first met with two teachers for assistance by attending a mandatory "eighth period." Moynihan continued by responding to the Reading concerns, mentioning that all other subjects rely on a student's reading ability. Teachers are currently undergoing an AIMS Web Training for Curriculum Based Interventions. In three years all teachers will be trained to provide interventions.

SCES Special Education

Terra Geer presented for SCES Special Education. She compared the two schools, commenting that in the elementary school most paraprofessionals are 1:1 and there are much

more related services in SCES than the MHS as there are more special needs including students with multiple and severe special needs. There are highly qualified staff that assist these students. Denney asked if these staff members would move up with students as they moved on to the middle and high school. Alan Pullman mentioned that there is a great deal of cross training, especially in the area of Downs Syndrome, where all paras are trained to handle student needs. Geer added that paras receive a great deal of training, all learning the same strategies and same skills. Hershel Strickland inquired on the number of special education students versus the total number of students to which he was answered 20/195 total, approximately 10%.

Geer moved on to discuss the half day preschool program at SCES for three and four year olds. She explained that children are referred to Special Ed. around age 2 ½ and the school starts delivering services at the child's third birthday, as required by law. It is not required to have a preschool but the school must provide services, the options being either a preschool on site or to manage and place students in local preschools. Trow commented that preschool must include typical peers, not be solely special needs students. Pullman explained that options were explored and overall it was determined that it would be cheaper to run their own program, using resources from the elementary school already in place. Trow stated that this becomes a benefit since there is more control over what is taught to these students and allows a more natural transition into kindergarten. She also added that the Childfind program is in place and that schools must look for students needing these services. Geer commented that this process includes educating the community, the goal being to catch needs early.

Discussion moved to current out of district special education. Currently there are seven students receiving out of district services, with a total tuition cost of \$414,000. Many students that receive out of district services are eventually transitioned back.

At 10:25 Shaun Carroll asked if questions should be asked regarding this area or held. Since Geer needed to leave before the end of the meeting, questions about special ed. were taken. It was asked if bumping up the .4 FTE to .6 FTE for the Special Ed. Directors would be enough of an increase. This amounts to the current two days per week to three days per week proposed. In this short amount of time there are huge responsibilities. Currently about .8 FTE of time is actually put in, even though there is no compensation. Carroll suggested that another paraprofessional be cut in order to increase the director FTE to .8. This would balance costs, when paperwork and such responsibilities cannot be left undone. Scott Unsworth, previously a para himself, added that paras can be quite beneficial for such a low cost. Trow commented that when directors go to meetings they are not given a substitute who completes their paperwork while they are absent and that they should be compensated for such times, especially since we want to keep them here (within the district).

At 10:43 a recess was called by Shaun Carroll.

SCES Budget Presentation:

At 11:01 the meeting continued with the SCES budget presentation. Alan Pullman highlighted some of the major projects made possible within this year's budget including the implementation of a new math program, building improvements, and new books for classroom libraries. The new math program cost was much cheaper than expected. Next year training in the area of science and new curriculum materials will be focused on, while continuing the current math program. Books for classroom libraries are also within next year's budget allowing for

books at a variety of levels for students instead of basals that tend to be at a limited level. The remaining budget increases will be in the form of warrant articles.

Judy Trow asked where pre-K will be located. The plan is to move the art room into a room currently used for OT and the preschool would be where the art room is currently (in the modular classroom). This change would not impact the budget. The library redesign plan is not a planning project, but a “doing” project. The room would be re-organized, including changes to book shelving that are not currently at student levels. This would allow a better layout for the library and computer lab that currently occupy the space.

SMHS Budget Presentation:

At 11:17, Sean Moynihan began the presentation for the SMHS budget. He started by explaining the improvements from the last year. There has been an increase of course offerings including some Advanced Placement courses and some new choices. Instrument inventory was increased to meet the needs and desires for students. There were several learning opportunities outside of school (field trips). The media center/library was modernized by reorganizing the space and making some improvements in the use of space.

Next year he hoped that a track program is added to the sports programs offered to students. Fall and winter seasons both offer more than one sport, while spring is limited to softball/baseball only. This sport would increase co-curricular activity for students and would appeal to a different group of students than current sports offered. Start up costs for equipment would be high (~\$10,000) compared to the long term (~\$5-6,000 yearly?). Long term costs would be minimal as the major costs of the sport include maintaining the facility (track) and hosting meets. It has been arranged that Sunapee can use other tracks and our own field and would not be hosting meets due to a lack of facility. Hershel Strickland commented that track is a more individual sport than most others offered which is good since some students are not as “team oriented.” Ed Bailey asked what grade levels would be able to participate and if we would compete against some of the same schools we compete against in other sports. It will depend on interest, and the possibility to share equipment between middle and high school is there. Some schools, like Moultenboro have reported that the availability to compete is there. We may be the smallest school to have a track program. Salaries for this and other sports were discussed, including the pay raise for coaches after being involved after five years. The costs as a whole for SMHS are down.

Technology Budget Presentation:

At 11:35 Mike Montore reported the technology budget. The major upgrade plan is to bump up the current 1.5 MB connection to a 3 MB connection (about the same as a Comcast connection found in homes). The current 1.5 MB connection results in a slow network and cripplingly slow access at times. He reported some of the current technologies in the district including two Smartboards at the elementary, numerous computers in classrooms and computer labs as well as projectors in any classroom where teachers deem them necessary. Instead of purchasing new overhead projectors, a new technology known as a document camera is starting to become popular. It is a small device that projects images of books and other materials eliminating the need for making overhead slides from a copy machine.

Hershel Strickland asked if a 3MB connection is a fix or merely a patch. It was reported

that more is really needed but that any more than that would require an entire change of infrastructure and would increase costs dramatically. It was reported that there is currently a three year technology plan in the process of being created to make plans for available monies. Finally, Kim Denney inquired about online courses. Sean Moynihan reported that online classes haven't been shown to be successful. Since they are not proctored the rate of failure is higher than that of passing.

Building & Grounds Budget Presentation:

At 11:45 Wayne Palmer reported the building and grounds budget. He began by explaining how his department stocked up on supplies because in November costs jumped. He also explained that the HS building, despite renovations has a 1974 building core. The plumbing and valves are outdated and components are no longer made. Public Service recently increased rates by 9%. All of these items have resulted in an increase of the budget.

Judy Trow inquired what 9% would look like as a dollar amount. Based on previous figures it was estimated to be approximately \$140,000. Oil prices are also going to be much more substantial. Last year the schools paid an average of \$2.26 per gallon versus this year the lock in is \$3.48 per gallon through Dead River Oil Company. Ed Bailey asked if it was possible to get out of it, perhaps by paying a fine. A figure of \$23,000 was mentioned to remove the floor price. Shaun Carroll stated how the lock-ins had to happen, since at the time the costs were projected to increase immensely. He stated he thought it would be better not to lock in since fluctuations tend to level out. Denney reminded members that last year community members were upset for not locking in. There was some debate over locking in versus not. Strickland suggested that business continue and Palmer concluded by reporting that the school pickup is old, and will not pass inspection and would like to replace it.

Proposals:

Brendan Minnihan stated that \$25,000 is proposed in dental insurance for employees that work 35+ hours. It is considered a wellness feature because without insurance, people tend to wait to seek treatment until more complications arise. By having this feature, employees may feel more valued. There was debate over whether part time staff should qualify for benefits, the fairness of allowing benefits for some departments versus others, and providing benefits as an incentive to keep a quality staff. He went on to propose an increase of salary for School Board members to \$1,200 and increase of salary for School Treasurer to \$2,400. He stated that these amounts are less than reasonable for the responsibilities of the positions, especially the School Treasurer. Board Members expressed discomforts of raising their salaries in a year when budgeting is tight. Scott Unsworth proposed that the School Board not receive a raise but the School Treasurer position salary be raised to \$3,200 or \$3,600. Judy Trow thought it may be the wrong year to be raising any salaries, knowing that members certainly don't run for the Board for the salary and shouldn't. Strickland stated that no year is ideal and that members really are not getting anywhere near what is deserved for their time. It was brought up that other town school board members earn anywhere from \$500-\$3,500 per year (Sunapee being at the bottom of this range). After debate among members, it was decided that although appealing it was not necessary and whether this proposal is or isn't made would be up to Minnihan.

12:35 Break for Lunch

At 1:10 Minnihan asked if there were any questions regarding previous business. With the addition of new programs, Scott Unsworth asked if any have been dropped. Moynihan responded that when numbers decreased in middle school a MS teacher was dropped. Another example was Virtual High School. With the fees and costs of overseeing teachers and high failure rate it proved not to be cost effective. Some things are able to be dropped without sacrificing overall quality. Strickland asked if any other co-curricular activities were taken away when not needed (“comparing apples to apples”). Middle School volleyball was eliminated since there was no longer interest, but that the goal is not to cut one to create another but to provide several choices as long as an interest exists. Shaun Carroll commented how nice it is to have a small school with so many opportunities.

Scott Unsworth asked if school buses should be a line item (as they are now) instead of a warrant article. Carroll explained how the buses are on an eight year replacement plan to keep them up to date and that newer buses remain under warranty for repairs. Kim Denney stated that the Board has a responsibility to have safe buses for students and not let it be an option for the town. Townspeople may vote buses down if they don't have children since they may not be as concerned about student safety. Unsworth suggested that a record of mileage, etc. be kept so that replacement scheduling makes sense. It was also suggested that a three sided garage be erected to protect buses and drivers from wear and tear. Palmer stated that Jim Hathaway wasn't interested in a structure since he cleans them off during inclement weather himself. The structure was discussed in more detail. Unsworth commented that such a structure may act as a gateway project, adding confidence if the project was successful. It was noted that such a project is in the long term plan, possibly to be completed in 2012-2013.

Review of Possible Warrant Articles (discussion began at 1:40pm) :

Article 1- Ball Fields (\$20,000)

Brendan Minnihan explained how both HS fields experience poor drainage despite maintenance. Home games have been played in Newport due to this issue. Palmer stated that he thought \$20,000 would not fix the problem totally but that it would help. Trow warned about putting time and money into the upper field with the possibility of a new elementary school being constructed in the near future. Palmer stated that the main goal of the upper field is to remove the sprinkler system valve that exists in the middle of the playing area of the soccer field. This summer, it is agreed that soccer teams will stay off fields to complete this work, with Jack Iacopino making arrangements to use other fields such as Newbury. Hershel Strickland inquired about the possibility of lighting the fields to allow for later games. Palmer stated that the ultimate goal is to put in a lighted turf field. He went on to say that even though the up front cost is much greater the overall upkeep is less over the years.

Article 2 – moved until end

Article 3- Boiler Maintenance (\$38,000)

Palmer reported that upgrading the burners of the boiler would make them more efficient. He stated that the boilers themselves are in good shape but the burners need replacement.

Article 4- SCES Capital Reserve Fund (\$100,000)

This article includes funds for improvements, as has been passed the previous two years. It was asked if monies were appropriated over the last two years and Palmer reported that if it wasn't completely used it was rolled over to the following year.

Article 5- Blodgett Building Repairs (\$10,000)

The purpose of this fund is to maintain the building the school purchased on Lower Main St. until it is used for other purposes. Spec Bowers asked what the intended use of the building was. It allows access to the school's property behind it (where the only other access is the small bridge leading to the ball field). It will also be the eventual SAU office instead of the leased space currently occupied. Carroll explained that currently the old owner still occupies it but there is a timeline in place for when he will be out of it. By keeping it occupied it prevents some deterioration by continued monitoring and upkeep.

Article 6-SAU 85 Capital Reserve Fund (\$150,000)

This fund will be added to monies already acquired so that it will be available to complete work to establish the new SAU offices. It may be possible to receive money from the Historical Society since the building qualifies. Bowers asked when the current SAU lease ends—April 2010 with the option to extend it until 2011. Smith asked if the new elementary school is constructed on the property behind the Blodgett building would it be torn down. It was reported that it wouldn't need to be torn down regardless of a decision and that it will be maintained. A study was done that showed it to have historical value. The Board would have the power to use the money in any way needed to make renovations.

Article 7- SMHS Carpet replacement (\$40,000)

Last year carpets were replaced in the middle school and this year carpet would be replaced in the high school.

Article 8- Special Education Capital Reserve Fund (\$25,000)

This article is proposed each year as a safety net. It is an expendable trust fund for use when unexpected costs arise.

Thus far the articles discussed are in the same area as last year's warrant articles, except the remaining article (2).

Article 2- Second Access/Egress to Elementary School (\$1,000,000)

Many studies have been done to determine the best placement and what the project would entail. If a road is created it would allow a second access to the school alleviating a present safety issue. Included in the price of the project was everything needed: drainage, cul-de-sac, guardrails, parking, drop off lanes, painted lines, etc. By doing this project it would allow the Board to get a feel for if the town is in favor to put more into the existing school or if a new location all together is desired. Palmer added that we've already paid to make the Safety Services parking lot able to sustain a road going through it. Trow pointed out that if the school were ever put on the market the additional parking and access would be an added benefit. The overall cost is great, but it also includes water and sewer lines as well. State funding may be available to complete the project. Funding would be either to help build the road (not the school)

or to build a new school once the road is in place. Carroll pointed out that when SHMS comes off a bond, more funds may be available. Perhaps the road could be put in for now and in a couple more years a new school could be proposed again. Unsworth asked if on the ballot it could be asked what choice townspeople prefer (renovating the old building or building new). Carroll warned of the experience the library had and preferred not to take that route. Smith noted that by putting this article on the ballot, others may be turned down as well since it is such a huge cost. It was also mentioned that the town has a large warrant article on the ballot as well. Further discussion continued about when the bond for SMHS ends in 2012, perhaps that would be a better time to introduce a large project such as the new elementary school. There was a great deal of concern over the fact that the proposed budget with all the warrant articles would raise taxes 7.8%. This is considered to be too great a number, especially considering the economy that we currently face. Consensus was to eliminate the second access article.

Further discussion continued on the need to make additional cuts within the budget to keep the tax increase down. A closer examination of the articles was done, reducing figures and rethinking what needs were of most importance. Some possible cuts included (not all inclusive):

- reducing article 4 to \$75,000
- reducing article 1 to \$15,000
- eliminating an additional paraprofessional from the salary (\$15,000)
- reducing article 7 to \$15,000 by painting only, not carpeting

Unfortunately, even these changes didn't reduce the overall tax rate percent increase very much. The amount of money that will be available to begin with (left from last year) will be less due to the unexpected costs in Special Education. Once the amount that will be left is determined a better picture will be in place as to what cuts will need to be made. It was suggested that the warrant articles be reordered once they are refigured so that the most important ones are first.

The point of whether or not money has been saved by breaking away from the old SAU was raised. It was suggested that, when we present to the public, we highlight what we have done in the first year are made clear and that expenses will become less to allow more saving.

Additional time is required to finish discussion and vote. The Board also needs to approve the plan for 403B. A last minute reminder was that next year will be teacher re-negotiation of contracts. Members were asked to go away thinking about this.

The next meeting will be December 15, 2008 at 6:00pm in the SMHS Media Center.

Adjournment

Motion to adjourn by Hershel Strickland at 3:16 pm. Seconded by Kim Denney. Vote was unanimous.

Respectfully Submitted by
Samantha Bailey
School Clerk