

CITY OF BERLIN
New Hampshire

Minutes of Council School Budget Session of 3/08/2017
Council Conference Room
6:30 pm

Members:

Mayor Grenier
Councilor Theberge
Councilor Rozek
Councilor Otis
Councilor Higbee
Councilor Nelson
Councilor Gentilli
Councilor Remillard

City Staff:

Patricia Chase, Finance Director

School Board:

School Board Chairperson Nicole Plourde
School Board Member Scott Losier
School Board Member Louise Valliere

School Staff:

Superintendent Corinne Cascadden
Administrator Bryan Lamirande
Amy Huter, Brown School Principal
Julie King, Hillside Principal
Amy Fauteux, BMS Principal
Veronique Legendre, Teacher

At 6:30 p.m. Mayor Grenier brought the meeting to order.

Mayor Grenier explained that the School Department historically meets twice with the City Council during the budget process. Tonight's presentation was the first in the cycle.

Superintendent Corinne Cascadden introduced members of the school board and staff employees attending the meeting.

School Board Chairperson Nicole Plourde distributed the FY18 proposed budget and briefly called attention to the Board of Education goals outlined on the first page of the proposed budget. Mrs. Plourde went on to review the Berlin Public Schools enrollment figures. The projected enrollment for the 2017-18 school year is 1,173 and is consistent with the decreasing enrollment over the years.

Mrs. Plourde discussed the increase in home schooled students which stands at 71. The out of district students have declined to 15. Mrs. Plourde also explained that the City's tuition rates are the second lowest in the state. There was a brief review of historical data on the school's share of the tax rate.

Mrs. Plourde reviewed the school's budget history and noted that the Administration request for the FY18 budget was \$18,448,382 and the Board of Education Request reduced it to \$18,412,314. The Administrative budget called for a 4% increase but with the Board's reductions the increase stands at 2.75%.

Superintendent Cascadden led a discussion around the cost effectiveness in managing out of district students. She pointed out that the FY18 budget is requesting two new positions: one is a Student Support Center Teacher for the Berlin Middle School. This position would provide assistance in behavior modification. The second position calls for a Reading/Math Intervention Specialist who would assist at-risk students to improve academically. Superintendent Cascadden pointed out that adding two new positions would aid in reducing and managing the need for out of district placements. The FY18 proposed budget reflects a decrease of \$158,279 for Tuition and Out of District costs.

Mrs. Plourde reviewed the school's oil consumption and noted that consumption has steadily decreased over the years. The average annual oil consumption from 2011-2016 was 111,698 gallons with consumption at 106,786 gallons during the 2015-2016 year. Administrator Bryan Lamirande mentioned that a future goal is to use under 100,000 gallons through improvements in temperature control and other cost saving enhancements.

A discussion followed regarding electrical costs for all schools. During the 2009-2010 school year the expense stood at \$186,071 and through thoughtful management has shown a decrease over the years with 2015-2016 expending \$153,805.

Mrs. Plourde then discussed the top two priorities for capital improvements. One is for new intercom systems and a new fire alarm system for Brown School.

Mrs. Plourde went on to discuss and highlight some of the reductions in revenue that the school faced. The State Adequacy Aid alone will be reduced by \$180,443 in the FY18 budget. As state funding is reduced then the local contributions will have to increase to cover the gap.

Superintendent Cascadden discussed the Court Ordered Student placements.

Following the presentation, Mayor Grenier opened up the meeting for questions and discussion. Councilor Nelson asked about the travel and conference expense line item. Administrator Bryan Lamirande explained some of the expenses factored into this line item. Councilor Nelson also asked about the request for a bus lift and Superintendent Cascadden explained that a School Department employee performs many of the bus repairs/maintenance and a lift would make it easier. Currently this item is not a top priority.

Councilor Higbee asked about the lower enrollment numbers and how administration intends to adapt to these changes. A lengthy discussion ensued around the possibility of opening up dialogue with surrounding communities in an effort to brainstorm and possibly work collaboratively to meet the needs of the schools during challenging financial times.

Councilor Higbee then asked about home schooled students and the changes noted earlier in the presentation. Superintendent Cascadden then discussed the increase and shared her concerns over the lack of authority to monitor and evaluate the progress made by home schooled students.

Councilor Remillard asked about the \$44,450 increase in the line item for equipment/computers. A discussion followed explaining that in large part it's for furniture and computer replacement. Councilor Rozek asked about the computers currently being used and Superintendent Cascadden explained that the school has been using Chromebooks.

Councilor Gentilli commented that the school is doing a good job.

Mayor Grenier then explained that the City is facing an increase of \$4.59 per thousand and in his opinion this increase is not sustainable. The Mayor asked the board to cut their budget and/or return to the City out of this FY17 budget a total of \$900,000.00. Mayor Grenier thanked the School Board and Administration for working with the Council in the past.

School Board Member Louse Valliere asked the Mayor to comment on his thoughts on regionalization. Mayor Grenier explained that he did not oppose it and further discussion followed.

Superintendent Cascadden asked about the potential for any new revenues coming into the City. Mayor Grenier discussed some of the City PILT agreements. Mayor Grenier then went on to discuss some challenges the City is facing. He would like to see the State share of school funding be restored and for the State to return to contributing 15% towards retirement costs.

Further discussion ensued on the concept of forming a committee with neighboring communities to address current challenges and the potential to combine resources.

Mayor Grenier adjourned the meeting at 7:35 p.m.

Submitted by Patricia Chase, Finance Director

