

PETERSHAM CENTER SCHOOL AGENDA
MEETING WITH ADVISORY FINANCE COMMITTEE
DECEMBER 10, 2013
CAFETERIA
7:00PM
AGENDA

I. CALL TO ORDER: Chuck Berube, Chair called the meeting to order at 7:00pm.

Members Present: Chuck Berube, Russell Fontaine, and Lynn Peredina.

Members Absent: None.

Others: Tari Thomas, Ross France, Jim Regan, Chris Durgin, Alyssa Roberts, and Kate Fulton from the Athol Daily News.

II. HEARING FOR VISITORS- Ann Townsend asked why Dana Kennan is sitting up front. Dana stated he is Special Assistance to the Superintendent. Ann Townsend asked if this is long term. Dana stated yes and that he has a contract.

III. NEW BUSINESS

- a. MSBA Loan Impact if Petersham Center School is utilized differently-** Tari stated that she reached out to Diane Sullivan and the MSBA and they have received other calls regarding the use of the Petersham School and they are not going to respond over the phone. Tari stated that she will be drafting up a letter to the MSBA and have the committee look over this before she sends it out. Chuck Berube stated that he would like to have a discussion tonight on exactly what that letter should say. Ross France stated that they are trying to address the issues that were brought up at town meeting. Chuck asked to clarify if that was the question of if they reduced the number of students in the building by elimination school choice would we be able to use the building for other purposes. Tari stated she will finish drafting that and send it off to the committee for approval.
- b. Estimated costs of running PCS without the School Choice Program-** Tari stated they were asked to project the costs if they did not have school choice. In the spreadsheet you can see that they compared the FY14 budget on the left with the reduction budget on the right showing where they could have made cuts considering there was no school choice. Tari stated that without the money received from school choice and taking the reductions into consideration the town appropriation would have increased by \$96,622 or a 7.9% increase to the budget. Tari wanted to bring up the fact that Mr. Rocke expressed that when communities look into these scenarios it is almost discouraging to see how little you save if you save any at all. Ross stated that this is exactly what they have asked for and there may be a few questions once they look over it. Tari stated that there could be adjustments made and she had to consider different lines and do the best guess with Mr. Dodge on where things would land if they only had 59 students in the school. Ross stated that the supplies, and textbooks line is the only thing that seems to jump pit at him but again those are small numbers. Chuck opened this up to the public to ask any questions. Dana Kennan stated that when they set the tax rate you have to deduct School Choice and since they estimated \$350,000 and the cherry sheet states \$399,169. Dana stated that it looks like last year's figure was used. Ross stated that it looks like we overfunded the school by \$49,000? Chuck stated that there

will be an income coming into the school due to school choice and we do not plan to spend that. Ross stated is it possible that we had an estimate before the public hearing?

- c. **The Free and Reduced Lunch Program-** Tari stated that she didn't recall this being a question until she read the minutes from the last meeting. Tari stated that the data around students that are a part of the free and reduced lunch program is information that she is not privy to. Tari stated that 30 students annually participate in the program and this year they have 32 which is about 29% of the students. Chuck stated that if we lost school choice students as a community decision would we see an impact on free and reduced lunch and would we see a financial impact that we were not expecting? Tari stated that each sending town sends along \$5,000 per student and additional funds will be sent along with those students but students that are enrolled in free and reduced lunch no additional money from the town is being sent because of this. Chuck stated that we would not see a positive or negative financial experience.
- d. **Annual decision on participating in the School Choice Program for the School Committee-** Tari stated this is generally something the committee decides upon in March. If you decide not to accept school choice students you are obligated to grandfather the students that are currently in the school so this would be a 6 year process to take yourself out of the program entirely. Tari thinks she mentioned that they revisited the school choice program relative to class size and this was something that Mr. Baldassarre surveyed staff and the staff came back stating that they were very happy with class sizes at that point in time. With that information the committee decided to not increase due to that information. Ann Townsend noticed that in the report of the last meeting there was a question about siblings being able to have priority? Chuck stated that this is a school committee policy and this is dependent on the seats being available.
- e. **Cost per pupil at Petersham Center School-** Tari stated we do not have the latest figures but in FY12 if you look at the department of education and the cost to education per pupil is \$13,310 and that state average is \$13,636. Tari stated that once the FY13 numbers are finalized they can get that data to them. Jim asked what the timeframe is on that. Tari stated that the end of the year report was submitted by the beginning of November and once that is finished this information can be found at the department of education. Dana Kennan stated that the cost per pupil to the tax payers is \$4,500. Jim Regan suggested for town meeting you explain the cost per pupil versus the cost to tax payers per pupil because that is a complicated question to answer and he anticipates them wanting that information. Dana stated that when you get a regional school budget that is a net budget but for a local assessment you are voting the budget bottom line only. Jim stated right but before town meeting you need to have a simple way of demonstrating how that works. Tari stated that is a great suggestion.
- f. **Enrollment projections from NESDEC-** Tari stated that the NESDEC projections actually show that on average there are 10-11 births per year as you move out through the year. The historical data is on the front and then on the third page it shows the projection on births and you can see where they project out 10-11 births in future years. Tari stated that they then project what the enrollment would be and they took into consideration the school choice program. The projection enrollments rise around 2019, 2020, 2021 and seem to be getting back to some of those numbers we had around 2005. Tari stated that this is hard because it is such a small projection to make but give their formulas this is where they see us heading.
- g. **The Budget process for FY15-** Tari stated that she thought it would be helpful for the committee to have a copy of the budget timelines for FY15 and would really like to partner with the AFC sooner rather than later. The finance committee would welcome that partnership and meet with Tari more frequently if possible and meeting with them helps making good decisions. Tari stated that she would really appreciate any input from them. Ross stated that if you keep contacting Dave that would be the best way to set up meetings in the future. Tari stated that so far this year we have done some good

reflection on the FY14 budget on what has went well and what has not went so well and where their priorities need to be for FY15. Tari stated that the principals and directors are meeting with Tari on Friday to take a look at the next step and they will have a first pass at their budgets by mid January. Jim stated that he can commit to meeting with them and if you want to put them in the timeline somewhere that would be great. Tari stated that she could develop a new timeline for Petersham Center School so it is more focused on the.

- h. Questions from the public-** Chuck asked if there are any questions on anything discussed tonight regarding school choice considerations, class size, and financials. Kate Fulton asked what the class size is limited to now. Chuck stated 16 per class.

Ann Townsend stated that it looks like NESDEC projections seem to be calculating at higher than 16 per class would this need to change the agreement on how many school choice students would need to be accepted by the committee? Tari stated that yes NESDEC does not cap it at 16. Chuck stated that yes we would have to accommodate that. Ann Townsend asked about the handout that Mr. Roche gave out that there were a total of 66 K-6 students in town and 51 are Petersham Center School is there any percentage on if there are going to be 11 births how many of those students would choose to come to Petersham Center School? Tari stated that he did share with us the spreadsheet stating the school choice receiving and the school choice sending. Ann asked is there any data on how many of those kids are educated in either this school or a different school. Dana stated that we would have to go back to the Department of Education. Ann stated that the school is here to educate our kids and was just curious as to whether there was some tradition or history regarding this. Chuck stated that back when his youngest was of age to go to this school there was no other option he thinks that some parents do consider other options. Chuck stated that this information would not tell us much anyways. Ann stated that she thinks the assumption in the NESDEC projection is that they assume that if there are 11 kids that are going to be birthed at some point all 11 of those students will come to kindergarten and in the past we can see that students can be veered to other schools. Ann asked should they proceed with what we have and continue along with always anticipated this money or be blindsided by a change that we are not expecting. Ann asked that educationally how the school maintains a viable population that is good educationally and makes sense financially. Chuck stated thank you and he agrees it is much more than just finances. Ross asked is there any other information on other districts that may have decided to not proceed with school choice. Chuck stated that there are 2 communities which are Warwick and Leydon and they are researching them. Leydon has about 46 students prek-6 and Warwick has 51 prek-6 and their budgets are each around 1 million. Tari and Chuck will be looking further into these projections. Chuck stated we can ask the people in that community and see if we can learn something from their considerations.

Deb Bachrach asked going back to the Proposed Budget worksheet that it looks like there was a reduction of only 14% in teacher salaries is that based on one teacher per grade? Tari stated yes. Deb asked is this based on 51 students. Tari stated yes. Deb then asked about the special education paraprofessionals and why they weren't lowered as much as the teacher's aides? Tari stated that she could not cut the special needs aides because those are needed due to IEPs and regular aides could be cut significantly. Deb then asked so it seems to look as if the special education population is in the Petersham students? Tari stated that she cannot respond on that and did not go that far into digging when creating this proposed budget. Ross asked how many special education paraprofessionals they have. Tari stated that she believes its 3 if not 4 aides included in that number.

Chris Durgin stated that number 22 scholar supplies line? Tari stated that they will actually be changing some of this in FY15. Chris stated that there was a substantial list that went home stating that they could receive all of the help they could get. Chris then

asked about contracted services what the difference is. Tari stated that line item 46 is maintenance such as HVAC and the other is the behavior specialist. Chris asked about the difference of the director of building of grounds and custodian? Tari stated that is because we have a director of ground (day custodian) and a night custodian. Chris asked where out of the budget did the I pads come out of that are in the Kindergarten classroom. Tari believes it was line 29 audio visual. Chris stated that she is having a hard time understanding the technology versus learning the basics and why I pads are needed in kindergarten. Tari stated that 21st century skills are essential in K-6 and one of the responsibilities is to integrate that educationally. Chris stated she thinks we need to dive a little deeper with the curriculum and is wondering why the curriculum that is used in Petersham is no longer used in Orange is it because it is lacking. Tari stated that in Orange they could not keep that curriculum because they could no longer financially support this. Chris stated that this might not be able to be financially supportive in Petersham either. Tari stated she would appreciate recommendations and so would Mr. Dodge in regards to the budget. Chris thinks that where else can we get some of these issues alleviated in order to relieve some of the strain. Ann Townsend thinks that is the kind of facts that are likely to come up at town meeting and stated that even though Petersham is a small town and has been accused of being wealthy that is not necessarily the case and people choose to come here because of the education. Ann stated that it might be worth looking to see if certain things can be fundraised for. Tari stated that a lot of schools will actually partner with their parent association so they can purchase things that the budget cannot cover.

Ann Townsend asked about the projection from NESDEC because it seems as if there were 6 home school students in 2013 which is not available information. Tari Thomas stated that as she knows there was only 1 student that was school choice out but Tari will get this clarified. Chris Durgin stated that she doesn't seem to think that all of the home schooled students are reported because there are 2 that she knows about. Tari Thomas stated that this is something that will have to be taken a better look at.

IV. ADJOURNMENT- *Russ motioned to adjourn at 8:10pm. Chuck seconded. VOTED: Unanimous.*

The listing of matters are those reasonably anticipated by the Chair, which may be discussed at the meeting. Not all items listed may in fact be discussed and other items not listed may also be brought up for discussion to the extent permitted by law.