

SANBORN REGIONAL SCHOOL DISTRICT BUDGET COMMITTEE

MEETING MINUTES

December 7, 2017

APPROVED

Members Present:	Annie Collyer, Chairperson	Charlton Swasey, Vice-Chairman
	James Doggett	Sandi Rogers-Osterloh
	Mary Cyr	Cheryl Gannon
	Jack Kozec	Tammy Mahoney, School Board Representative

Call to Order: 7:02 pm

Pledge of Allegiance

Motion to approve minutes of the Nov. 30, 2017 meeting; Mr. Doggett

Second: Mr. Kozec

Discussion: Amendments were made and submitted prior to the meeting; Ms. Rogers-Osterloh added committee comments made by herself and Mr. Masson.

VOTE to Approve: Unanimous

School Board report, Ms. Mahoney:

At the December 6 meeting, the School Board amended the Superintendent's proposed budget by adding \$357,737. This makes the total budget \$35,292,066, a 1.01% increase over this year's budget.

The board voted to accept some items from the administration's "Executive Summary", a list of what they felt were priorities to be added into the budget:

Teaching positions: (\$206,960) Eliminate 6 rather than the 8.5 teaching positions that were in the Superintendent's initial proposal on Nov. 1 which met the school board's charge to show what a decrease of 2% in the current budget would look like. The 2.5 teachers would primarily impact the elementary schools. Mr. Ambrose noted that over 2/3 of the administrative team are new to the district, it was hard to assess the district needs in just 3 months and they recommended this adjustment after further consideration.

Administrative Support position: (\$50,000) The Business administrator and Curriculum Director developed a job description outlining the duties of this position and the school board felt the position was warranted.

Stipends, reimbursements for phone & travel: Mr. Swasey expressed concern that these amounts were not able to be located in the budget. Ms. Collyer responded that much of this is contractual and it would take many hours to locate specific reimbursements for each staff member receiving them via contract or board policy.

Mr. Swasey stated that he has yet to see the contracts and there have not been answers to his requests for a list of names of staff members and amounts they were paid.

Mr. Ambrose indicated that the CBA contracts for professional and paraprofessional staff as well as relevant board policies which include information about rates of stipends and reimbursements for mileage and phone use have been provided to the Committee via hyperlinks on the Nov 30 slide presentation in the Budget Committee's Google Drive. A chart with cell phone and mileage was also created and shared with the Committee. He also indicated that after consulting with legal counsel, while the dollar amounts are able to be given, the names of individuals are not available and per "Right-to-Know" these do not need to be provided.

Ms. Rogers-Osterloh spoke with the elementary principals who stated that they were given the opportunity to restore a total of \$20,000 reduced from their supply budgets in the Superintendent's initial budget. She felt that there was an inequity in that the middle and high schools, facilities and athletics did not get the same opportunity to restore supply budget requests. She also pointed out that enrollment is declining in the elementary schools.

Mr. Ambrose said he felt that since the relative percentage of the overall budget reduction to the elementary schools was greater than that of the other locations, this reinstatement was justified. He also stated that while the elementary enrollment has declined, it is not as significant since it is spread out amongst various grades. The decline is most evident when the elementary students funnel into the Middle School. Adjustments to staff have been proposed at the Middle School accordingly.

Ms. Collyer made reference to historical spending on these line items being an average of \$50,000 less than budgeted and suggested a reallocation of funds to accommodate needs at the elementary schools.

Mr. Ambrose agreed that this needs to be examined over time. He suggested that the details of what is actually included in this category called "supplies" item. The Nov 15 slide presentation gives more specific information about these, which includes replacement furniture.

Ms. Rogers-Osterloh suggested restoring funds for furniture replacement if that is the actual need. Or, the School Board may need to examine re-allocation.

Mr. Ambrose felt the Board did not go into detail with this since it was a relatively small percentage of the whole budget. But, he felt comfortable reducing it by \$3,000 which was the cost of the water stations which are slated for elimination. He also said staff would be encouraged to spend according to student program and material needs and any remaining money would be returned to taxpayers.

Ms. Rogers-Osterloh expressed concern that in past years, funds would be spent at the end of the year for things that may not have been needed so that justifies going through the budget with a fine tooth comb so taxpayers can feel confident funds are being spent appropriately.

Mr. Doggett raised concern about discussions pertaining to how funds might be spent if there are any available, not about items that are actually written into the budget being presented. He felt that in the past, people may have had ideas for new expenditures after the budget was written and want them to be funded without having been seen during the budget process.

Mr. Ambrose clarified that "Maker Space" is the name of a program, not an item with a specific amount of funds attached to it. Any physical supplies for such programs would actually be written into the budget. It is not an attempt to hide expenditures. He also indicated that he and the Business Administrator found it difficult to navigate the current budget format and that they are anticipating a new format for categorizing and recording to improve ease of locating and accounting for specific budget items and reduce suspicion that things are being intentionally "hidden". Drilling down to locate specifics is very time-consuming with the current system.

Ms. Gannon asked, in reference to the term "spending spree" as being expenditures made without having been written in the budget, would the board's approval to spend \$30,000 from the current fiscal year's budget for the NESDEC study be considered as such?

Mr. Ambrose stated that the end of each fiscal cycle, in a budget of \$34 million, having 3-4% of funds remaining is considered an acceptable amount according to standard accounting practice. The Board has the prerogative to spend some of those funds, put it in clearly-defined reserves to be available if for an emergency or returned to taxpayers to offset taxes in the subsequent year. This helps level out the tax burden from year-to-year. He also expressed the opinion that current reserves in places such as Special Education are low and if they are used up, transfers from other accounts (approved by the board) may be necessary. This budget has been reduced considerably but he feels that when the budget format is re-vamped, it will be easier to identify areas that can reasonably be reduced and they can re-allocate funds to be used for other needed programs without having to increase the bottom line.

Mr. Swasey felt that in past budgets, there has been more money than has been spent. He coined the phrase “June spending spree” and felt putting money in reserves has been the “devil’s playground”. With money “slushing” around “loose”, the Board has come up with projects to spend it on since taxpayers have already approved the total budget amount. He stated that this year he learned that if a project costs \$20,000 or less, it does not have to go out to bid. He stated that practice enabled the former Business Administrator to spend money without having to tell anyone about it.

Ms. Gannon objected to the implication of wrong-doing by a former employee without providing specific evidence or such.

Ms. Mahoney stated that there was no additional spending approved in June. She does not approve of that practice but she felt that if there were funds left over at the end of this year, using it for the NESDEC study would not be an extraneous expense because it is a very worthwhile project.

Mr. Doggett stated that after examining the School Board’s proposed increases to the budget, he would accept adding \$6,000 of the requested \$12,000 to the Bakie budget. Mr. Ambrose felt comfortable with that amount. Mr. Doggett asked if surplus furniture in Swasey Gym could be used in any of the schools.

Ms. Rogers-Osterloh spoke with the Special Education Director regarding the need for para-professionals at Bakie and she supports the request for these staff.

Ms. Gannon had a question about the Committee guidelines process of funneling questions for administrators through the chair. She wondered why Ms. Rogers-Osterloh was able to ask questions of principals and the Special Ed director on an individual basis rather than submitting questions through the chair. Ms. Rogers-Osterloh stated out that she approached them during the break of the School Board meeting and did identify herself as a member of the Budget Committee. She felt that she did not have an opportunity to ask these questions during the meeting because the “Public Comment” portion of the meeting had passed. Ms. Collyer responded that outside of Budget Committee meetings, individuals did not give up their rights to speak with administrators as private citizens.

MOTION: Add \$6,000 to the Bakie budget, Mr. Doggett

SECOND: Mr. Kozec

Discussion: Ms. Collyer would prefer the \$12,000 be added to be spent for items such as Maker-Spaces, but the Board decides how to expend funds.

AMENDMENT TO MOTION: Mr. Doggett amended his motion: Move to increase the budget from \$34,934,329 to \$34,940,328 to reflect an increase of \$6,000 to the Bakie supply budget.

SECOND: Mr. Kozec

Discussion: Ms. Cyr commented on the original motion stating that she did not wish to quibble about \$2,000 in a \$34 million budget. The question boils down trusting the administration to oversee the process and spend the funds in the best interest of students.

VOTE: Yes=1 (Doggett)

No= 6 (Collyer, Kozec, Mahoney, Cyr, Rogers-Osterloh, Gannon)

Abstain=1 (Swasey)

MOTION FAILED

MOTION: Add \$12,000 to the Bakie budget, Ms. Rogers Osterloh

SECOND: Ms. Mahoney

Discussion: None

VOTE: Yes= 6 (Collyer, Kozec, Mahoney, Cyr, Rogers-Osterloh, Gannon)

No= 1 (Doggett)

Abstain=1 (Swasey)

MOTION CARRIED

NEW BUDGET AMOUNT : 34,946,329.12

MOTION: Move to add \$8,000 to the Memorial budget, Ms. Rogers Osterloh

SECOND: Mr. Kozec

Discussion: None

VOTE: Yes= 6 (Collyer, Kozec, Mahoney, Cyr, Rogers-Osterloh, Gannon)

No= 1 (Doggett)

Abstain=1 (Swasey)

MOTION CARRIED

NEW BUDGET AMOUNT: \$34,954,329.12

Middle School

On the list of items on the Administrator's asked to be added to the budget, some sports were for the Middle School. Ms. Rogers-Osterloh asked Mr. Ambrose if the Middle School principal had input into the re-allocation of funds and he stated that he did.

There were no changes to the Middle School budget request, no action required.

High School

Only additions on the Executive Summary document list were sports that have already been taken out of the Superintendent's original proposal. No action taken, the high school budget remains as-is.

Technology

Mr. Ambrose indicated that the items on the Executive Summary list (climate controls and technology switches) likely can be funded through the Facilities Use Revolving Fund so do not need to be in the budget. Ms. Croteau is researching the specific language that would confirm if this fund could be used.

Ms. Gannon pointed out that the cost of the controls are listed as TBD and Ms. Collyer indicated we are waiting to see if they would save money on heating costs.

Ms. Gannon asked how potential spending of the reserve funds is prioritized. Are these 2 expenditures essential enough to warrant depletion of the fund?

Mr. Doggett clarified that this is not a "reserve" fund, it is money generated by fees from outside organizations using the facilities. Spending is authorized by the School Board authorizes, it does not come out of the budget funded by taxpayer dollars.

Ms. Gannon asked about online subscriptions and if they are all needed and being used regularly. Mr. Ambrose stated they are in many different locations in the budget and there is a need to streamline that. He felt some could be eliminated but it is still being researched. He cautioned that some of the subscriptions are under multiple-year contracts and that may impact potential reductions.

Ms. Collyer commented that there were a number of questions on how to locate specifics on particular categories of expenses. Also, there is an opportunity to get additional information and change the budget between now and the time the final total amount is due in late January.

MOTION: Reduce the technology budget by \$20,000, Ms. Gannon

SECOND: Mr. Doggett

Discussion: Ms. Mahoney asked for justification for arrival of the amount of \$20,000.

Ms. Gannon stated that she came up with that amount as a percentage of the total online subscription budget of approximately \$200,000.

Ms. Rogers-Osterloh felt uncomfortable approving this amount without having a conversation with the Technology Director.

Mr. Ambrose felt that the district is not currently prepared, nor do they currently have the time, to thoroughly analyze the level of use of the online subscriptions. He also cautioned that some of the subscriptions were multi-year contracts that must be funded and that if the reduction is made, the money may end up having to come from another area of the budget.

Ms. Collyer stated she will vote against this motion in favor of giving the new administration time to research to obtain more precise information.

VOTE: Yes=3 (Swasey, Gannon, Doggett)

No=5 (Collyer, Kozec, Rogers-Osterloh, Mahoney, Cyr)

MOTION FAILED

Mr. Doggett stated that he feels the Math Coordinator position should be removed from the budget because it went beyond the original scope of the request for the position many years ago. Mr. Swasey feels there has been limited results seen from the position.

Ms. Rogers-Osterloh stated that last year the administration provided information about the benefits of this position and she felt that there was benefit to the elementary grades but that it did not carry over to the high school.

Mr. Ambrose commented that this is the first time he has heard of opposition to this position and that had it been raised in the process of written submissions, he could have communicated with staff to get some information on the benefits of the position to student achievement. Mr. Ambrose pointed out that the state test rigor has increased with the adoption of the Smarter Balanced assessment so it is not valid to compare results to those from the previous test.

At this point, not having had time to thoroughly analyze he cannot, with confidence, evaluate the value of the position and indicate whether or not it should be maintained or eliminated.

Ms. Cyr commented that math scores are good in the elementary and middle school but that it is hard to make a direct correlation between this position and lower test scores at the high school. Changes have been made at the high school but that they need time to come to fruition. She will not support elimination of the position.

Mr. Kozec will not support cutting the position.

MOTION: Add \$110,960 into the budget for teaching positions, Mr. Doggett

SECOND: Mr. Swasey

Discussion: Mr. Swasey agreed with Mr. Doggett in discontinuing funding the K-8 Math Coordinator position and would be willing to give the administration a year to analyze it.

Mr. Doggett rescinded his motion.

Substitute teachers:

MOTION: Include additional pay for substitutes 25,777, Mr. Doggett

SECOND: Mr. Swasey

No discussion

VOTE: Unanimous

MOTION PASSED

MOTION: Include additional \$25,000 for professional development, Ms. Rogers-Osterloh

SECOND: Ms. Mahoney

Discussion:

Ms. Gannon asked for details on how the figure of \$75,000 was derived and how it would be spent.

Mr. Ambrose stated \$32,000 was in last year's budget, it was increased by \$75,000 in the Superintendent's proposed budget. An additional \$25,000 from the Executive Summary was approved by the School Board, bringing it to \$107,000.

Mr. Doggett and Mr. Swasey stated they would not support this, expressing concerns about the specifics of the expenses in relation to outcomes and that this may lead to additional positions and expenses in up-coming years. Mr. Swasey recommended that the administration present this request next year along with a report on outcomes from the already-approved \$75,000 increase in funds.

Other members expressed support of the concept of professional development but differed in their support of increasing the funding in the budget this year.

Mr. Ambrose stated there is a history of reductions in professional development in past budgets in order to be able to retain teaching positions. He reminded the Committee that there have already been reductions of about \$750,000 from the current budget. He feels that the lack of professional development is the #2 issue in the district. His plan is to bring in well-known experts as part of a district-wide plan to improve student outcomes rather than single events teachers attend to earn credits. It will be an annual, on-going part of the budget.

Mr. Doggett mentioned a concern about the tax impact on taxpayers.

VOTE: Yes: 4

No: 4

MOTION FAILED

Items tabled for discussion: Additional teaching positions, Administrative Support Position, NESDEC study.

PUBLIC COMMENT: Jim Baker, Newton. Thanked members for their hard work on the budget.

Ms. Gannon requested the expected revenues for the committee. Mr. Ambrose said he has not seen them yet.

Next meeting: December 14, 7 pm

MOTION TO ADJOURN

Yes: unanimous

Meeting adjourned at 9:37 pm

Respectfully submitted,
Cheryl Gannon, Budget Committee Member
Recording Secretary, Pro Tem