

MINUTES
**SOUHEGAN COOPERATIVE SCHOOL DISTRICT
ANNUAL MEETING IN ACCORDANCE WITH
SENATE BILL 2 (NH RSA 40:13)
February 7, 2006 Deliberative Session
AMHERST, NEW HAMPSHIRE**

Moderator Cynthia Dokmo called the deliberative meeting at the Souhegan High School Theater to order at 7:00 p.m. Mrs. Dokmo introduced Carol Holden, who led the voters in the Pledge of Allegiance.

Attendee numbers: 126 Amherst, 20 Mont Vernon residents.

Moderator Dokmo welcomed those attending. She explained that voters under SB-2 rules are empowered to do two things: (1) discuss and debate each warrant article and (2) maintain or amend the original wording of the article which then appears on the March 14, 2006, official ballot. Moderator Dokmo presented the rules of the moderator. The rules included: Only amendments presented at a microphone would be accepted by the moderator, amendments are to be made in writing, voted on separately; a three minute time limit per speaker; the question not to be called if any voter is waiting at the microphone; and a motion to restrict reconsideration in accordance with RSA 40 Section 10 to be made immediately following the announcement of the vote on an article. The warrant was printed in the Voters' Guide and made available to all citizens of Amherst and Mont Vernon. Extra copies were available at the meeting. The rules were accepted without objections. Mrs. Dokmo dispensed with reading the warrant.

Mrs. Dokmo announced the March 14, 2006 voting times for Official Ballot Voting (second part of Annual Meeting) for Amherst and Mont Vernon:

- Voting for Amherst residents: Souhegan High School, from 6:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m.
- Voting for Mont Vernon residents: Village School, from 8:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m.

Mrs. Dokmo introduced Souhegan Cooperative School Board Chair, Stephen Coughlan, who introduced the other members of the School Board: Janet Gaynor, Jeanne Ludt, Janet Phelps, John Rizzi, Phyllis Thomas and John Walsh.

Superintendent Howard Colter introduced other administration that were present at the meeting including, School District Counsel, Gordon Graham, Director, Special Instructional Services, Kathryn Skoglund, Assistant Director, Special Instructional Services, Renea Sparks, Business Administrator, Susan Ward, Principal, Mont Vernon Village School, Meredith Nadeau, Director of Curriculum and Professional Development, Nicole Heimarck, SAU Technology Director, Bruce Chakrin, Principal, Souhegan High School, Scott Prescott, and Student Council Representative to the School Board, Alex McGuire .

Mrs. Dokmo announced two Assistant Moderators were available to assist her in running the meeting if needed, they were Carol Holden and Bob Schaumann.

Mrs. Dokmo introduced the chairperson of Finance Committee, Arthur Faint. Mrs. Dokmo publicly thanked the members of the Finance Committee for all their hard work. Mr. Faint introduced the other members of the Finance Committee that were present: May Balsama, Allise de Smet, Anne Dodd, Dan Foley, and Christine Morley. Members not in attendance included: Mike DeChambeau.

Stephen Coughlan welcomed attendees to the meeting. Steve spoke about Souhegan Cooperative High School. He said the school has 1,046 students, 174 staff including 113 professional staff and 61 support staff. It consists of two buildings on 42 acres – the Main building and the Annex. Steve told members of the audience the school board had the following vision: Engage, challenge and support all learners. He said the school boards goals were to differentiate instruction and programs to meet the needs of all learners, and improve performance in reading; writing, math and complex thinking skills in all curricular areas.

Scott Prescott, Souhegan High School Principal presented the Indicators of Success for Student Academic Achievement. Scott said in 2005, with a student population of 1,030, 204 AP exams were given, compared to 35 in

1993 (student population of 597) Scott provided statistical data for 2002-2004 for College Admissions Test Scores as well as National Merit Scholarship Results for 2001-2006. Scott spoke about the NHEAIP Scores and highlighted their goal – All students should be proficient or higher. Scott also provided statistical data for Reading and Math for the 2004-2005 school year.

Alex McGuire, Student Council Representative to the School Board highlighted some of the Indicators of Success for the Class of 2005: 99% graduated in four years, 87% went on to college, the students submitted 488 applications to Most Competitive, Highly and Very Competitive colleges, 52% of those were accepted, of those, 35% chose to attend those schools, and 69% of those who applied to specialized schools (primarily art) were accepted. Alex also highlighted Points of Pride from Student Activities.

Mrs. Dokmo told meeting attendees article 1 was not for discussion tonight therefore, she proceeded directly to article 2.

Mrs. Dokmo recognized Phyllis Thomas, who moved to accept the following article:

ARTICLE 2.

To see if the district will raise and appropriate as an operating budget, not including appropriations by special warrant articles and other appropriations voted separately, the amounts set forth on the budget posted with the warrant, or as amended by vote of the first session, for the purposes set forth therein, totaling \$16,135,999. (Should this article be defeated, the operating budget shall be \$15,421,404, which is the same as last year, with certain adjustments required by previous action of the district or by law, or the governing body may hold one special meeting, in accordance with RSA 40:13, X and XVI, to take up the issue of a revised operating budget only.) **The School Board supports this article. Majority vote required to pass.**

John Walsh seconded the motion.

Phyllis Thomas moved to amend article 2 as follows: To see if the district will raise and appropriate as an operating budget, not including appropriations by special warrant articles and other appropriations voted separately, the amounts set forth on the budget posted with the warrant, or as amended by vote of the first session, for the purposes set forth therein, totaling \$16,135,999. (Should this article be defeated, the operating budget shall be \$15,316,139, which is the same as last year, with certain adjustments required by previous action of the district or by law, or the governing body may hold one special meeting, in accordance with RSA 40:13, X and XVI, to take up the issue of a revised operating budget only.) **The School Board unanimously recommends this article. The Finance Committee unanimously recommends this article. Majority vote required to pass.**

Phyllis highlighted four of the budget elements in the FY06 proposed budget – Personnel (Teachers and staff), Programs (Books, supplies, and equipment), Special Education (Federally Mandated) and Operation and Maintenance. (Buildings and grounds) She also discussed the distribution of costs by function. Phyllis presented the total proposed net budget for 2006-2007 of \$15,348,715, which included Food Service, Federal Grants of \$787,283 for a total gross budget of \$16,135,999, which was \$1,077,718 over the 2005-06 adopted budget, which represents a 7.2% gross increase and a 6.8% net increase over the 2005-06 adopted budget.

Steve Coughlan highlighted what the 6.8% increase represented. Steve summarized the changes from the current years budget which included: Changed budget presentation from net to gross, cut part-time teacher, added Special Education Staff to support increased student load, increased salaries for teachers and support staff, increased Professional Development budget for staff, eliminated Early Retirement option for professional staff, and increased student athletic fee.

Kathy Skoglund, Director of Special Education summarized the factors impacting the cost of Special Education and presented a slide which highlighted the number of Special Education students from 2000-2001 through 2006-2007. Kathy also presented a slide detailing the Indicators of Success for Special Education.

Steve Coughlan summarized the New Teacher Agreement. Steve said the agreement is a one year agreement for Professional Staff which included: An agreed increase to the base salary from \$32,100 to \$34,100, no change in

step increase and a new step added at the top of the range. Steve also presented the New Support Staff Agreement, which is also a one-year agreement and includes the following: Increase to base salary from \$7.75 to \$8.25/hour (\$0.50/hour), Paraprofessional job definitions were set to reflect current assignments and competitive wages.

John Rizzi presented the projected tax impact as follows: Amherst 2004-05 \$8.21, 2005-2006 (proposed) \$8.85, Projected change \$0.64 (\$192/year for a house assessed at \$300,000). Mont Vernon 2004-05 \$6.25, 2005-06 (proposed) \$6.80, Projected change \$0.54 (\$162/year for a house assessed at \$300,000).

John Rizzi also presented a slide, which detailed the tax rate history for the Souhegan Cooperative School District.

John Walsh highlighted what the default budget would be should the proposed budget be defeated. John provided a slide detailing what the Default budget calculation would look like. He also explained why the proposed budget was higher than the default budget.

Mrs. Dokmo asked for comments from the Finance Committee.

Arthur Faint thanked the School Board, the SAU staff, and the School Administration for all their help in assisting them with their review of the budget. Arthur said the Finance Committee unanimously supports the budget and Article 2.

Lee Slocum congratulated the board for eliminating early retirement from the teachers contract. Lee asked if Souhegan was paying for Special Education students if parents were placing them from out of district. Steve Coughlan said no, if students were being privately placed, the parents were responsible for paying their tuition.

Tom Mortimer asked what the student to teacher ratio was and how it compared to other towns. Steve Coughlan presented a slide with 2004 data. Steve said we were neither the best town nor the worst, but were in the ballpark.

Tom Parker asked if the budget could be broken out by the percent change of increase in each category, if Souhegan currently has contracts with energy providers, and are we required by law to provide the current level of funding in Special Education or are we providing above what is required by the federal government.

Steve Coughlan provided the following percentage increases:

- Energy 82%
- Electricity 41%
- Special Education 14%
- Technology 30%

Steve Coughlan said the high school uses natural gas and since it's a regulated utility, they could not pre-buy. Steve said Amherst and Mont Vernon can pre-buy oil and they do.

Mrs. Dokmo asked meeting attendees to vote on the amendment. The Aye's had it therefore, the amendment was adopted.

Mrs. Dokmo instructed the clerk to place Article 2 on the ballot as amended. The amended article is as follows:

To see if the district will raise and appropriate as an operating budget, not including appropriations by special warrant articles and other appropriations voted separately, the amounts set forth on the budget posted with the warrant, or as amended by vote of the first session, for the purposes set forth therein, totaling \$16,135,999. (Should this article be defeated, the operating budget shall be \$15,316,139, which is the same as last year, with certain adjustments required by previous action of the district or by law, or the governing body may hold one special meeting, in accordance with RSA 40:13, X and XVI, to take up the issue of a revised operating budget only.) **The School Board unanimously recommends this article. The Finance Committee unanimously recommends this article. Majority vote required to pass.**

Steve Coughlan moved to restrict reconsideration. John Walsh seconded the motion. The motion to restrict

reconsideration carried by voice vote.

Mrs. Dokmo recognized John Rizzi, who moved to insert the following article on the official ballot:

ARTICLE 3.

Shall the School District raise and appropriate, for the renovation of and additions to Souhegan High School to establish a two-classroom wellness/physical education teaching space, the amounts of:

- \$270,000 from taxation; and
- \$92,770, an amount equivalent to the interest earned on the Annex building proceeds? and
- \$205,048 from private gifts and grants for the project, and to authorize the School Board to apply for, accept and expend federal, state or private grants, gifts or donations for this purpose?

This will be a non-lapsing appropriation per RSA 32:7 and will not lapse until the wellness facility is completed, or by June 30, 2010, whichever is earlier. **The School Board unanimously recommended this article prior to amendment, and will recommend this article as amended by a vote of 5 to 1. Majority vote required to pass.**

John Walsh seconded the motion.

Cynthia Dokmo recognized John Rizzi to move to make an amendment to article 3.

Shall the School District raise and appropriate, for the renovation of and additions to Souhegan High School to establish a two-classroom wellness/physical education teaching space, the amounts of:

- \$475,048 from taxation; and
- \$92,770, an amount equivalent to the interest earned on the Annex building proceeds?

This will be a non-lapsing appropriation per RSA 32:7 and will not lapse until the wellness facility is completed, or by June 30, 2010, whichever is earlier. **The School Board unanimously recommended this article. Majority vote required to pass.**

John Walsh seconded the motion.

Susan Ward spoke about the changes to the amended article. Susan explained the initial funding configuration, which originally included \$105,048 in state building aid. Susan said two factors prompted the amendment to Article 3: 1) Recognition that State Building Aid, at 40% of the eligible costs of the project, is applied after the project is complete, and is returned as revenue that reduces the tax rate through payments over a period of 5 years. 2) Acknowledgement that raising \$100,000 is an ambitious undertaking, and that failure to raise an appropriate amount could impair the successful completion of the project in a timely manner.

Jeanne Ludt spoke to the article. She said she hoped by the end of the presentation, all questions would be answered. Jeanne said there is a misconception that the project is a weight room expansion. Jeanne told members of the audience there is a lack of adequate indoor open space and appropriate equipment. Wellness classes have been conducted in the hallways for the past five years, which is unacceptable. Jeanne said over the years, the student population has doubled and the wellness space has stayed the same. She said a new wellness facility would provide our wellness programs with the adequate indoor open space and appropriate equipment in which to deliver the wellness curriculum, thereby increasing the opportunity for all students to become more physically active.

Jeanne said the new space would allow all students – boys and girls, athletes and non-athletes, to strive for improved health and fitness levels. The facility would be an investment for the long-term, life-long benefits to the health and well being of all the students.

Jeanne said the Souhegan School Board believes it is unacceptable for classes, which are a state graduation

requirement, to be conducted in the hallway. All other reasonable alternatives have been thoroughly explored.

Jeanne provided the following Souhegan Student Health Data – 35% of incoming freshman had BMI's (Body Mass Index) indicating moderate to high risk of obesity; 67% of incoming freshmen failed the cardiovascular component of the Physical Best Test. Jeanne explained obesity rates have tripled in teens over the last 20 years; an overweight adolescent has a 70% chance of becoming an overweight adult; and being overweight or obese and leading a sedentary lifestyle are major risk factors for developing diabetes.

Jeanne provided the following quote by William Potts-Daterna of the Harvard School of Public Health – “Kids have to be healthy to learn and they have to learn to be healthy. Healthy kids make better students. Better students, make healthy communities.”

Jeanne explained to meet the state graduation requirement; students must complete 1 credit in wellness and .5 in health.

Janet Gaynor presented the solution to the lack of adequate indoor open space and appropriate equipment – A two-classroom addition totaling 3984 sq. ft. consisting of a Wellness Classroom and a Fitness Room. The addition would be constructed to the left and rear of the main gym. A slide of the proposed Souhegan High School Wellness Facility was presented.

Janet presented the benefits to the addition – Provides adequate space and equipment for wellness programs and all students, staff and faculty and the community benefit from the addition.

Janet emphasized where the funds for the project would be coming from – Annex Account Interest \$92,770 and a One Time Warrant Article \$475,048. The total estimated cost of the construction project is \$567,818. The project would be eligible for 40% state building aid totaling \$227,126.

Janet presented the tax impact for Warrant Article 3 - \$300K Home in Amherst - \$87 and a \$300K Home in Mont Vernon \$73. Janet explained the article impacts the tax rate for one year only.

Janet emphasized the reasons why the project was too important to ignore – Wellness classes in the hallways for five years, concern about the health and fitness of our students, and new federal requirements.

Janet suggested attendees take a copy of the wellness flyer that was available at the Deliberative Session. She thanked a very generous Souhegan parent for setting up a website for the Wellness Facility project. The website is www.souheganwellnessfacility.org. Janet acknowledged all the time and energy by many volunteers for the project thus far. She announced the Health and Wellness Forum on February 13, 2006 at the High School.

Howard Colter spoke in support of the Wellness Facility. Howard said last year they started with discussions and a review of the weight room and it did not take long to determine the problem was much larger than the weight room. He said the teachers, administration, coaches, and students validated the problems. Howard said the need for a new facility has not been exaggerated at all.

Howard said in his opinion, he believes the proposal is fairly modest. The proposal includes one room for equipment to keep you heart rate in good shape and one large room for physical activity. Howard said they plan to equip the room from donations.

Mrs. Dokmo asked the Finance Committee for their position. Art said the Finance Committee supports this article as amended by a vote of 4 to 3.

Mrs. Dokmo asked if there were any comments or questions from meeting attendees.

Patty Bemis thanked the board for taking this issue so seriously. She said the weight room is an unhealthy situation and dangerous. She said she has a student at the high school and he will not go into the weight room for this reason. She said she supports this article.

Robert Golder suggested another way to create space. He said if a student plays a sport, why couldn't it go towards the credit needed to graduate which would make room for the students that don't play sports to earn the credit by taking a wellness class. Robert also said he believes the \$92,000 they plan on spending on the Wellness Facility should go back to the Taxpayer's.

Janet Gaynor said by a student playing a sport, it does not replace their required wellness credit. Janet said the board would have to go to the Commissioner of Education to get this approved and she does not think the board would move in this direction.

Janet said they have given money back to the taxpayers in the past, but the board believes the \$18 that would go back to the taxpayers would be of greater benefit to the kids in the community if it is used towards the SHS Wellness Facility.

Noel Ward asked why the need for extra wellness space was not foreseen when the Annex was built a couple of years ago.

Janet said when the Annex was built, she was not on the School Board.

Brent Thomas, student at SHS said the weight room is not safe. He said the gymnasium couldn't hold more than 3-4 classes at a time. He said the lack of space does not allow for students who want to use the room extra or for additional credit the opportunity to do so.

Mrs. Dokmo asked if there were any further comments or questions and since there were none the moderator instructed the clerk to place Article 3 on the ballot as amended below.

Shall the School District raise and appropriate, for the renovation of and additions to Souhegan High School to establish a two-classroom wellness/physical education teaching space, the amounts of:

- \$475,048 from taxation; and
- \$92,770, an amount equivalent to the interest earned on the Annex building proceeds?

This will be a non-lapsing appropriation per RSA 32:7 and will not lapse until the wellness facility is completed, or by June 30, 2010, whichever is earlier. **The School Board unanimously recommended this article. Majority vote required to pass.**

Steve Coughlan moved to restrict reconsideration. John Walsh seconded the motion. The motion to restrict reconsideration carried by voice vote.

Mrs. Dokmo recognized John Rizzi, who moved to insert the following article on the official ballot:

ARTICLE 4.

Shall the School District, if Article 3 fails, raise and appropriate the sum of up to \$92,770 to be added to the Souhegan Cooperative School District School Maintenance Expendable Trust Fund established in 2005 and authorize the use of that amount from the June 30 fund balance for this purpose (this amount is equivalent to the interest earned on bond proceeds transferred to the general fund on or before June 30)? This appropriation will be void if Article 3 is adopted. **The School Board unanimously recommends this article. The Finance Committee unanimously recommends this article. Majority vote required to pass.**

John Walsh seconded the motion.

Mrs. Dokmo asked if there were any questions, comments, or proposed changes to the article. They're being none, Mrs. Dokmo instructed the clerk to place Article 4 on the official ballot as it appeared on the warrant.

John Rizzi moved to restrict reconsideration. John Walsh seconded the motion. The motion passed on voice vote.

Mrs. Dokmo recognized Lee Slocum, who moved to accept the following question:

ARTICLE 5.

Shall the voters of the Souhegan School District within school administrative unit 39 adopt the provisions of RSA 194-C:9-b to allow for insertion of the school administrative unit budget as a separate warrant article at annual school district meetings? **The school board unanimously opposes this article. Majority vote required to pass.**

Eileen Naber seconded the motion.

Leo Slocum spoke to the article. He said the taxpayers do not have the opportunity to vote on the SAU Budget and if this article passes, you will have the opportunity to vote.

Janet Phelps said the school board unanimously opposes this article. Janet spoke about the board's reasons for opposition to the article.

Mrs. Dokmo asked the Finance Committee for their position. The Finance Committee said they unanimously oppose this article.

Al Ryder said he is against SB2 but is for this article. He said by voting yes, it would allow the voters the opportunity to vote on the budget at the polls.

Patty Bemis said she was opposed to the article.

Mrs. Dokmo then asked if there were any further comments or questions on article 5, hearing none, Mrs. Dokmo instructed the clerk to place Article 5 on the official ballot as it appeared on the warrant.

A motion to restrict reconsideration was made by Peter Bergin and seconded by John Walsh.

Carol Holden moved to adjourn. Ann Dodd seconded the motion, the motion carried by voice vote and the meeting adjourned at 9:30 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Lyn Jennings, Souhegan Cooperative School District Clerk