

**SOUHEGAN SCHOOL BOARD
BUDGET PUBLIC HEARING**

**Minutes
January 13, 2010**

Chairman Steve Coughlan called the meeting to order at 6:10 p.m.

**I. CALL TO
ORDER**

Present

Souhegan School Board: Chairman Steve Coughlan, Pam Coughlin, Jeanne Ludt, Mary Lou Mullens, Christine Janson, and Dan Foley.

Administrative Team: Dr. Mary Jennings, Elizabeth Shankel.

Minutes Recorder: Heather Loewy Nichols

ATTENDANCE

Chairman Coughlan explained that the first Warrant Article is for the election of officers. He noted that there are four opportunities to run this year including two Amherst positions, one Mont Vernon position, and a Moderator position.

**II. REVIEW OF
MEETING/
ADJOURN**

Mr. Coughlan explained that the main article is for the approval an operating budget of \$18,211,827 with the condition that if the operating budget is not approved then a default budget of \$18,042,260 will be in effect and the School Board will have the opportunity to hold one special meeting to take up the issue of a revised operating budget. Mr. Coughlan explained that the bulk of the funds go towards personnel costs, followed by program supplies, then Special Education costs as the school is required by law to provide a free and appropriate education to Special Education and finally cost for the operation of the facilities, grounds, and athletic facilities. He explained that the proposed operating budget is an increase of \$441,405 or 2.48%. Mr. Coughlan then reviewed the student and teacher trends from 03-04 to 10-11 noting that the Board is proposing employing 89 teachers next year, while maintaining a student teacher ratio of 80:1. He then reviewed the annual percentage change from budget to budget and a pie chart showing how the entire budget is expended. He noted that the bulk of the cost is for Regular Education and a significant piece also goes to Special Education.

Ms. Mullens explained that the health benefits have increased this year 22.5% or \$221,000, dental has increased \$10,000, and retirement funding has increased \$92,000. She also reminded the audience that the district is in the second year of a three year contract and any salaries are representative of the contract that was approved two years ago. She explained that the proposed

budget includes a reduction of two Regular Education teachers, increased hours for the Student Assistance Professional, the reallocation of support staff from Special Education to Regular Education, reduction of .5 Special Education professional, reduction of 1 Special Education support staff, and decreased out of placement costs.

Ms. Ludt explained that the Board is not proposing any new initiatives in an effort to mitigate the uncontrollable costs and reviewed the revenue sheet with the audience. She explained how taxation is calculated noting that the unreserved fund balance is subtracted from the expenditures. She noted that this amount fluctuates yearly as it is an estimate and sometimes predicted increases could be lower and may leave a surplus. She stated that this amount must be returned to the tax payers and this budget includes \$182,000 as an estimated surplus. She explained that food service struggles to minimize their loses and they have a predicted a revenue decrease again this year. She explained that the Community Counsel Cafeteria Committee has spent a lot of time working to positively impact the food service program. She also noted that the revenue from student athletic fees has been decreased due to the family cap the Board approved.

Ms. Jansen reviewed the proposed tax rate noted that the Amherst tax rate will be \$6.43 per thousand for an increase of \$.27, which on an \$400,000 would be an increase of \$108. She further explained that in Mont Vernon the new tax rate would be \$8.29 per thousand or an increase of \$.68 which on an \$400,000 home would be an increase of \$272.

Mr. Foley explained that should the voters decide not to approve the proposed budget the district would be forced to operate under a default budget and reviewed how the default budget is arrived at. He explained that the default budget is increased by contracted obligations and reduced by one time expenditures from the FY10 budge. He further explained that teacher and support staff reductions are also removed. Mr. Foley stated that the default budget would make it difficult to meet the needs of the students and would likely make an impact on the support staff. He noted that the difference between the proposed budget and the default budget is \$169,567 or \$28 less in Amherst and \$44 in Mont Vernon.

Ms. Peterman of the Souhegan Finance Advisory Committee thanked the School Board and the administration for working diligently to come up with a budget that reflects the difficult time with little change in the student population. She stated that they were quite aggressive and chose to support

the items they felt strongly about especially considering that they were handicapped with \$323,000 in expenditures in health, dental, and retirement benefits. She noted that reductions were made across the board and thanked the Board for the process that was used the year. She also thanked Ms. Shankel for her support and stated that the Finance Advisory Committee supports the proposed budget.

Chairman Coughlan called for public comment and heard none.

Ms. Coughlin read Article 3 and explained that it provides the district with resources to deal with the facilities' needs. She stated that there is currently \$34,000 in the fund as the Board withdrew from the fund this year to pay for a detailed analysis of the facilities. She noted that this fund helps stabilize the tax impact of the aging facilities and is only funded with surplus funds.

Ms. Peterman stated that the Souhegan Finance Advisory Committee recommends the passing of the article.

Ms. Coughlin called for public comment and heard none.

Ms. Coughlin read Article 4 and explained that as the school ages and the population ages the district has liabilities for retirement. She explained that the fund was established in 2007 and funded with \$25,000, however since then no deposits have been made.

Ms. Peterman stated that the Souhegan Advisory Finance Committee is in support of the article noting that neither of these articles have an impact on the tax rate and putting money away for these purposes is commendable.

Chairman Coughlan called for public comment and heard none.

Chairman Coughlan declared the public hearing adjourned at 6:40 p.m.