

Souhegan Cooperative School District Public Hearing

Wednesday, January 8th, 2020

Public Hearing Minutes- Approved 01 27 2020

Attendees:

Administrative Team: Adam Steel- Superintendent, Christine Landwehrle- Assistant Superintendent, and Michele Croteau- SAU #39 Business Administrator.

Souhegan Cooperative School Board: Jim Manning- Chair, Pim Grondstra- Vice Chair, Laura Taylor- Secretary, Amy Facey, Steve Coughlan and David Chen.

Public: Joel Gordon, 7 Steeple Lane, Amherst NH, Ellen Grudzien, Amherst School Board Member, 18 Buckridge Dr. Amherst NH, Howard Brown, SAFC Member/ 2 Blood Road, Mont Vernon, NH, Dwayne Purvis, 145 Hollis Road, Amherst NH, Jeanne Ludt, SAFC Member/ 3 School Street, Amherst NH, Stephanie Grund, 5 Colonel Wilkins Road, Amherst NH, and Anthony Nino, 0 Willow Lane, Amherst NH.

I. Public Hearing Call to Order

Chair of the Souhegan Cooperative School Board, Mr. Jim Manning, called the Public Hearing to order at 6:00 PM.

He then noted that Superintendent, Mr. Adam Steel, will be reviewing some important highlights.

Superintendent Steel began his presentation noting 3 Budget Goals:

1. Pass a budget that supports our continued strategic efforts
2. Support a 4-year teacher agreement that solves competitive imbalances
3. Pass the first year of a 20-year plan to support a capital maintenance plan

He then reviewed the SHS OECD PISA scores in Reading, Math and Science.

He also reviewed the Math and Reading SAT scores.

Next, Superintendent Steel explained the financial performance of the District.

The Souhegan budget has increased 1.3% since 2011. They underspent their budget by \$1.2m last year, mostly due to savings in Special Education where projected impacts were higher than actual. Their special programs, which are matriculating to Souhegan, have saved the SAU \$6.1m over the past four years while artificially increasing their cost-per-pupil calculation.

Furthermore, the amount the State pays in adequacy across the state has increased \$229 (per student) since 2012, but has decreased for SAU #39 by \$105 (per student) during that time.

38 Mr. Steel further explained how the way that they have taught math has changed and what skills
39 are expected today.

40 He then reviewed the Portrait of a Graduate including things such as a Knowledge Constructor,
41 Critical Thinker, Confident Global Citizen, Skilled Collaborator and Engaged Learner.

42 With that said, every child deserves is a unique roadmap in a world of change, a challenge that
43 prepares, an anchoring adult who guides, and finally an available affordable next step.

44 In closing, Superintendent Steel reiterated the three areas of focus.

- 45 1. Pass a budget that supports our continued strategic efforts
- 46 2. Support a 4-year teacher agreement that solves competitive imbalances
- 47 3. Pass the first year of a 20-year plan to support a capital maintenance plan

48 Souhegan Cooperative School Board Chairman, Mr. Jim Manning, thanked the members of the
49 Souhegan Advisory Finance Committee. He then noted that they are volunteers that did
50 outstanding work.

51 He then read Warrant Article #2 Operating Budget.

52 **Warrant Article #2 Operating Budget:**

53 *“Shall the Souhegan Cooperative School District raise and appropriate as an operating*
54 *budget, not including appropriations by special warrant articles and other appropriations*
55 *voted separately, the amounts set forth on the budget posted with the warrant or as amended*
56 *by vote of the first session, for the purposes set forth therein, totaling eighteen million, three*
57 *hundred seventy-seven thousand, four hundred and seven dollars (\$18,377,407)? Should this*
58 *article be defeated, the default budget shall be eighteen million, three seventy-one thousand,*
59 *six hundred and fifty-one dollars (\$18,371,651), which is the same as last year, with certain*
60 *adjustments required by previous action of the Souhegan Cooperative School District or by*
61 *law; or the governing body may hold one special meeting, in accordance with RSA 40:13, X*
62 *and XVI, to take up the issue of a revised operating budget only?”*

63 ***Majority vote required.***

64 He then explained some budget highlights:

65 As Superintendent Steel mentioned before, the proposed budget includes \$485k in additional
66 staffing reductions.

67 He further explained that they are managing declining enrollment with the costs and tax impact
68 associated with that and trying to get into alignment with a modern world and modern education
69 system.

70 He then remarked that they are also going to ask the taxpayers to support a PPC agreement.
71 When you look at the budget in its entirety, it has increased 1.54% from FY’ 20, but would be
72 reduced by 2.05% if not for mandatory increases in Special Education.

73 Mr. Manning then clarified the Budget by Fund. He noted that they have the General Fund, Food
74 Service Fund, and then the Grant Fund. In terms of the Food Service Fund, they are working for
75 it to be self-sufficient, and it is the General Fund that will drive the tax rate.

76 He then reviewed the Budget by the Advisory Finance Committee. It is sorted a different way,
77 however, one of the biggest line items as you can see is Special Education.

78 Souhegan Cooperative School Board Member, Mr. David Chen, commented that he will be
79 discussing Enrollment and Cost Per Pupil.

80 He added that in the past they have used the Cohort Method, for forecasting enrollment. They
81 have found a volunteer and he has made a projections using housing sales, birth rates, etc.

82 Mr. Chen added that this is the curve that they will be following.

83 The Cost Per Pupil projection is a function of the State mandate. They used to be one of the
84 highest in the State and they have made big strides against it. The State average in FY' 20 is
85 \$16,600 and that it is growing faster. Souhegan's CPP is \$ \$20,849 (per student) in FY' 20.

86 He then asked SAU #39 Business Administrator, Ms. Michele Croteau, for a forecast.

87 Ms. Croteau replied approx. \$21,700 and that is a rough estimate.

88 Mr. Chen then reviewed position changes. He added that they had to increase their Special
89 Education Paraprofessionals and were well aware of that change.

90 As they find out the enrollments in different classes, they will make adjustments with the Master
91 Schedule.

92 He then reviewed the Default Budget Calculation, which is driven by State Formula. The
93 difference between the Proposed and the Default Budget is \$5,756.00. When you drive the
94 proposed budget down, it has become closer to the default budget.

95 Souhegan Cooperative Board Member, Mr. Steve Coughlan, noted that he will speak to Warrant
96 Article #3, PPC Agreement (Personnel Policies Committee).

97 **Warrant Article #3. PPC Agreement**

98 ***Shall the Souhegan Cooperative School District vote to approve the costs included in the***
99 ***agreement between the Souhegan Cooperative School Board and the professional and support***
100 ***staff of Souhegan Cooperative High School which calls for the following increases in salaries***
101 ***and benefits at current staffing levels:***

	<i>Fiscal Year</i>	<i>Estimated Increase</i>
102	<i>2020-2021</i>	<i>\$299,102</i>
103	<i>2021-2022</i>	<i>\$298,994</i>
104	<i>2022-2023</i>	<i>\$298,133</i>

106 **2023-2024** **\$298,656**

107 *and further to raise and appropriate the sum two hundred and ninety-nine thousand, one*
 108 *hundred and two dollars (\$299,102) for the 2020-2021 fiscal year, such sum representing the*
 109 *additional costs attributable to the increase in salaries and benefits over those that would be*
 110 *paid at current staffing levels?*

111 ***Majority vote required***

112 The last agreement was two years ago and they are presenting to you tonight, and on the ballot, a
 113 4-year agreement with the Professional and Support Staff. These are estimated costs. They take
 114 the circumstances that they know at this moment in time. It is safe to say that these are the worst
 115 case costs.

116 The bottom line is that it is a pretty level increase. It was a deliberate effort, in part, by all of the
 117 parties to come to something that was fair to the staff and taxpayers. It is a 4-year agreement and
 118 if approved, will level it out the contracts.

119 It balances out some discrepancies and the biggest driver is Professional Staff. Paraprofessionals
 120 are a smaller portion and are paid less. This allows for higher increases to be comparable to other
 121 districts. They will still be behind but will be closer.

122 There is no change in the health insurance plans that are offered and that is the highest
 123 percentage in the SAU.

124 Souhegan Cooperative Board Member, Ms. Amy Facey, then reviewed the Capital Maintenance
 125 Plan Warrant.

126 **Capital Maintenance Plan Warrant Article #4**

127 *“To see if the Souhegan Cooperative School District will vote to raise and appropriate the sum*
 128 *of one hundred thousand dollars (\$100,000) to be added to the School Maintenance*
 129 *Expendable Trust Fund previously established in March 2005?*

130 ***Majority vote required”***

131 She then discussed that they had a Capital Needs Assessment done by On Site Insight.

132 She added that there are extreme variations and that makes for a less than desirable impact. She
 133 then explained the 5-year funding plan for Capital Projects from the Capital Needs Assessment.

134 Ms. Facey added that this a snapshot of the next 20-year plan.

135 She then summarized the Capital Maintenance Plan.

- 136 • Completed a comprehensive Capital Needs Assessment for both the Souhegan and
- 137 Amherst School Districts.
- 138 • Established a Year-by-Year Plan for Capital Needs projected over the next 20 years.
- 139 • Determined the annual funding required to execute these projects, while creating a
- 140 consistent tax impact.

- 141 • Amherst and Souhegan coordinating annual tax impact of approximately \$650K total
142 increasing with the CPI.

143 What they are proposing:

- 144 • An annual Warrant Article to fund the Expendable Trust Fund (ETF) for Capital Needs
145 projects
146 • Complete projects each year in accordance with the Capital Needs Assessment and Year-
147 by-Year Plan
148 ○ With potential adjustments made as needed (based on state of systems to be
149 replaced, emergency repairs, etc.)

150 Chairman Manning then summarized the Public Hearing noting the Budget Goals:

- 151 1. Pass a budget that supports our continued strategic efforts
152 2. Support 4-year teacher agreement that solves competitive imbalances
153 3. Pass the first year of a 20-year plan to support a capital maintenance plan
154

155 Warrant Articles:

- 156 1. Budget: \$18,377,407 (Default of \$18,371,651)
157 2. PPC Agreement: \$299,102
158 3. Capital Maintenance: \$100,000
159

160 He then opened it up to Public Comment
161

162 II. Public Comment

163 Mr. Joel Gordon, 7 Steeple Lane, Amherst NH, asked about the Capital Maintenance Budget
164 proposal.

165 Ms. Facey added that the concept is that they have enough money to use for projects and to
166 maintain a balance.

167 Mr. Gordon asked about the \$500,000, per year. He asked if it gets spent in that year and if it
168 was an ongoing maintenance expense.

169 Ms. Facey replied that this is just year one and Amherst will request their own and it will go on
170 the ballot.

171 Mr. Gordon then asked about the PPC Agreement. Was that incorporated into the default budget
172 member.

173 Mr. Coughlan replied, no. It was not adopted by the voters

174 Mr. Gordon added that it does not feel quite right and the voters do not have a lot of say in what
175 will happen next year one way or another.

176 Mr. Manning added that they do not have a Town meeting and they are an SB2 Town.

177 He added the default calculation is cut and dry and the other piece is that this year, they really cut
178 deep into the budget this year. They did not know that they were going to have this PPC
179 agreement. He added that they got the proposed budget down as much as they could.

180 Mr. Coughlan mentioned that he was here for the original SB2 discussions and the SB2 law was
181 put into place in districts where expenditures are growing. It gives voters a real choice and the
182 cuts come on both sides. He added that they have made the choice and it is low.

183 Ms. Ellen Grudzien, ASB Member/ 18 Buckridge Drive, Amherst NH, asked about the Capital
184 Investment and more detail that Mr. Gordon is looking for. She then asked for greater
185 clarification for the taxpayers.

186 Ms. Facey replied that it is a 5-year funding plan and they have determined. It is based on the
187 Capital Needs Assessment.

188 Mr. Howard Brown, 2 Blood Road, Mont Vernon, NH, asked about the Capital Needs
189 Assessment. He then asked if it has to be a posted meeting.

190 Ms. Facey responded that they are trying to be proactive and that is why they have had the
191 Capital Needs Assessment completed.

192 Mr. Manning further added that they know that they are having issues and that the fact that their
193 elementary schools are not accommodating their students. The school needs a lot of work.

194 Mr. Brown asked about the amount in the fund.

195 Ms. Croteau replied that they have the amount of \$249,135, at the end of November.

196 Mr. Brown then asked about the default budget and if it does not pass.

197 Mr. Manning replied. Yes.

198 Mr. Dwayne Purvis, 145 Hollis Road, Amherst NH, asked about the school maintenance and
199 returning money and if there was an excess. He then asked what is changed this year, and why
200 was it necessary not to make it and if there were things that needed to be fixed.

201 Mr. Manning asked for greater clarification on Mr. Purvis's question.

202 Mr. Purvis added that in the past there was a surplus.

203 Mr. Coughlan replied that the large surplus, Unexpended Fund Balance, was not anticipated at
204 the time that they wrote the warrant articles for last year's voting. Additionally, a large chunk of
205 that money was not expendable.

206 He then explained that they have a capital expenditure plan. They want to raise \$650k across the
207 two districts, so there is a constant tax impact to the voters. Some years there will be greater
208 needs at Souhegan and then other years where it will be Amherst. The whole point of this is to
209 level the tax impact for the taxpayers.

210 Ms. Jeanne Ludt, SAFC Member/ 3 School Street, Amherst NH, requested information about the
211 approx. \$500k in reductions. She commented that she is very concerned about what kind of
212 impact it will have to deliver curriculum and services to their students. She is struggling with
213 that.

214 Chairman Manning replied that part of the impetus for that is that they felt like their teachers
215 needed a raise over ten years. Those are the teachers of the future. He then asked if they are
216 getting the greatest level of efficiency, in scheduling, course offerings, etc.

217 He added that with the PPC agreement looming, they began looking at greater efficiencies.

218 Superintendent Steel explained the early retirement incentive.

219 Ms. Stephanie Grund, 5 Colonel Wilkins Road, Amherst NH, inquired about the Capital
220 Maintenance Budget. She emphasized that they have students taking advanced classes in 25-
221 year-old Science Labs and that something has to be done.

222 Superintendent Steel agreed with Ms. Grund. He then added that the Capital Maintenance Plan is
223 to maintain their facilities. Improvements are what they are discussing with the SAU #39
224 Facilities Committee. The Board has charged him to put together a list of projects if surplus
225 exists. For him, the number one priority at SHS are the Science Labs.

226 Ms. Grund then asked if they are looking at software purchases, Professional Development, etc.

227 Mr. Steel replied, that the nuanced answer is no, however, they are doing it in the minds set of
228 where they are going.

229 Mr. Coughlan added that the PPC agreement has an additional clause for Professional
230 Development, with no specific cost.

231 Mr. Brown added that going forward they have to set up their meetings so that they are
232 conflicting with Amherst. He then asked to schedule the Public Hearings on a different day so
233 that they can extend the meeting.

234 Mr. Anthony Nino, 0 Willow Lane, Amherst NH, remarked that he appreciates seeing the
235 savings and then asked where did they come from. He added that he would like to see that \$1.3m
236 in savings listed publically.

237 Mr. Manning replied that they had overestimated Special Education costs. He further explained
238 that they planned to have more students then did not. He then clarified that the \$1.3m in savings
239 belongs to the taxpayers.

240 III. Public Hearing Adjourned

241 **Chairman Manning closed the Public Hearing at 7:10 PM.**

242

243