

The meeting was called to order at 7:00 pm by Vice Chair Pat Martel starting with the Pledge of Allegiance. Present were Committee members Pat Martel, Gene Cordes, Gordon Muench, Jon Benson, Emily Phillips, Josh Yokela and Steve Bonaccorsi; School Superintendent Ellen Halliday and Business Administrator Nathan Castle; and Recording Secretary Shawn Perreault.

Motion was made by Bonaccorsi to approve the meeting minutes of October 26, 2022 as presented, seconded by Benson. Motion passed with a vote of 6 Yes – 0 No – 1 Abstain (Phillips). However, it appears these were the wrong minutes to approve. These minutes were already approved on November 2, 2022. The meeting minutes of November 2, 2022 will need to be approved at the next meeting along with these current minutes.

### **Review School Budget:**

**School Administration Staff Presentation:** Castle and Halliday passed out the working budget books for FY 24.

They started off by reviewing anticipated changes for FY24. These included the following increases: Contracted Salaries, Health Insurance by 9.5%, Dental by 1.5%, Sanborn Tuition (offset by enrollment), Regular Transportation and Water Treatment Costs. The following are the anticipated decreases: Teacher Turn-over/New Hires, Retirement rates: Teacher's rates are going from 21.02% to 19.64% and Employee rates are going from 14.06% to 13.53%.

The proposed budget without the new estimation from Sanborn is \$12,348,064.90, which is a decrease of \$38,872.10 or 0.31%. The proposed budget with the estimated 5% increase given to Fremont from Sanborn is \$12,562,405.18, which is an increase of \$175,468.18 or 1.42%. Again, this is with the percentage given to Ellis on November 1<sup>st</sup>, the final GR will be given on December 15 and can still increase past the 5% estimate of November 1<sup>st</sup>. One of the things the School board is seeking to do with the next high school contract will be to guarantee that number a lot sooner in the budget season. The School Board has no control over the Sanborn increases, these are all contract driven. There was a lot of discussions held on the capital costs. The default budget is higher than the proposed budget by \$52,120.52.

Enrollment was provided as well as a breakdown of class sizes and teachers/staff. They are projecting enrollment to increase by one student at Ellis and by 3 at Sanborn.

Budget Summary was provided and the following were line decreases Special Ed, Athletic/Extra Curricular, Nurse, Occupational Therapy, Improvement of Instruction, Special Ed Admin, Plant Operations and Special Ed Transportation. The six highest increased lines were: Regular Ed, Social Work, Guidance, Computer Tech, Superintendent and Regular Ed Transportation.

Trust Fund balances were provided as of September 30, 2022, as well as each Trust Fund goal. These funds are added using funds from the surplus fund balance before returning money back to the taxpayers. A list of all revenues was also provided in the binder.

### **The following discussions were held on the above presentation:**

Yokela questioned the status of the Esser II and Esser III funds which are due to expire on 9/23 and 9/24 respectively. Halliday stated they are waiting for a camera lighting project bill to come in on the Esser II and that will complete those funds. There are still funds available on Esser III of those funds \$64,000 must be set aside for loss of learning, which is used for tutors and summer school. She will provide the rest at the next meeting.

Castle stated that main reason the default budget is higher than the proposed is due to teacher/staff turn-over. Most positions that were filled were done so at a lower pay step. In addition, there is a specific formula that is used when determining a default budget. Also with a default budget, you are not allowed to add positions, but when you remove something you must remove it from both budgets.

Phillips questioned class size and enrollment when compared to similar sized schools. Halliday stated that Ellis is very comparable to other similar sized schools and is currently 15-1. That there is an increase in enrollment for Pre-K to 2<sup>nd</sup> grade. Currently 3<sup>rd</sup> grade is the smallest, but still falls within the School Board's Classroom size policy, which was provided to the Budget Committee. Also, depending on students moving in or leaving the District, shifting teachers to certain grades may be needed. Yokela and Phillips would like to see the enrollment summary include an employee/teacher column for at least the last three years or years that are easy to fill in and then moving forward. Halliday stated the ratio is very clear for regular education but is skewed when you add special education in because special education is based on a child's specific needs, which can vary greatly per student.

Benson wanted to know if Fremont's capital costs decreased with the addition of grade 6 to the high school. Muench stated that it did not decrease our capital costs. That our capital costs are determined by the contract. He also stated that, although they have declined to renegotiate our contract, they have chosen to be more favorable to Fremont when they can. Muench also expressed that how Sanborn chooses to treat us now will have a huge impact on how the Town votes on any upcoming contract with the three possible schools in the running, after our current contract expires in 2026. Halliday stated our increases to Sanborn could have been up by 30% over the last few years had Sanborn chosen to only go by the contracted increases owed to them. Our capital costs are 5% and Kingston/Newton's are 4.5%. Further discussion was held on the process for the upcoming new contract, what the School Board will be looking for and how it will be presented to the Town on an upcoming Warrant Article. There will be no Warrant Articles regarding this presented to the Town this coming March. Halliday also reminded everyone that a new contract will need to be approved by all Towns. If one Town fails, the contract fails and Fremont starts over.

Warrant Articles for the school were reviewed. Castle stated they will be seeking the following: Election of Officers, Teacher contract, special meeting in case the contract fails, and the operating budget, Maintenance Trust fund transfer of up to \$100,000 and Technology Trust Fund transfer of up to \$50,000 (if there is not enough money in surplus, funds are given in the order the warrant articles were listed). The Trust transfers will be coming from surplus fund balance. There was a lot of discussion on how the Trust Funds were created (Greg Fraize came in to offer some history as well). The discussion covered the Town voting to create the Trust Funds, who has the authority to spend the money (School Board), the percentage of a budget that should be a comfortable cushion, the results of not budgeting enough money, the process for eliminating a Trust Fund or changing it, and examples of unfunded mandates handed down by the State(which then are required to be added to the following budget).

Bonaccorsi asked Castle and Halliday about any grants that can be applied for or have been applied for. Halliday stated they are always looking and applying for grants. However, grants have to be something needed and not just wanted. Something that once the grant money is used can then be discontinued and not create an added cost to the budget for future years.

Muench reviewed DOE numbers comparing Ellis School's cost per student vs. the State average. He also compared the high school. Bonaccorsi would like to see a list of all the large projects the school has as future needs. Castle will provide that at the next meeting.

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**Approved 11/16/2022**

**9 November 2022**

In closing, Halliday stated they presented a budget that will meet the needs of the students. The Budget Committee will review the presented material and come back with some recommendations or questions. Some Committee members would like to see the budget a little leaner.

All questions will be sent to Castle, cc'd to Holmes and answered by Castle at the next public meeting. No answers will be sent by email.

Next meeting date is November 16, 2022 held in the first floor meeting room at the Town Hall.

Adjourn at 8:30 pm.

Respectfully Submitted,

Shawn Perreault  
Recording Secretary