

Approved 11/15/2023

Present were Committee Members Mary Jo Holmes, Jon Benson, Gordon Muench, Gene Cordes, Brenda Beauchain and Nancy Murray; Secretary Shawn Perreault and School Administrators Nathan Castle and Ellen Halliday.

The meeting was called to order at 7:00 pm by Holmes and was held in the basement meeting room at the Fremont Town Hall, 295 Main Street in Fremont. All rose for the Pledge of Allegiance.

A motion was made by Benson to approve meeting minutes of October 25, 2023 as presented. Muench seconded. Motion passed by vote of 6 Yes, 0 No.

Holmes did send Castle about 5 questions prior to this meeting, which he answered. He will review them as they come up in the presentation.

School District Budget Presentation – Superintendent Ellen Halliday and Business Administrator Nathan Castle made the presentation. Halliday opened the presentation by highlighting their process by acknowledging that: 1. Academic and social emotional planning must be robust and meet students where they are and move them forward; 2. Student health and safety needs are always a priority; 3. Special Education caseload requiring additional needs and services; and 4. The cost of goods, services and labor have all dramatically increased.

She reviewed the steps they are taking between leadership teams, administration and the School Board when drafting the budget. Halliday reviewed the items that must be anticipated in the budget proposal: Contractual increases, Insurances (which increased by 10.2%), Support staff negotiations, High School Tuition rates at Sanborn, staffing levels to support special education needs and federally mandated services required by IEP.

Halliday reviewed some facility projects that were completed: paved and sealed the parking lot, various safety upgrades, replaced carpeting in front foyer and work to our sprinkler system – replacement of piping and valves. She stated how lucky the District is to have Mr. Normandin as the Facility Director with his dedication to the School and making sure things are up to date and well maintained. She further stated that some of the safety upgrades were done with grant money.

ARP Esser III funds which were allocated to address needs connected to Covid-19 learning and safety will expire in September of 2024. These funds have been used for additional furniture, adaptive playground equipment, Chromebooks, Communication needs: such as marquee, repairs to intercom system, facility needs like a salt/sander and other safety needs. There is approximately \$30,000 left in this fund, which will be spent before it expires.

Teaching and curriculum needs were reviewed. Supply and equipment lines were examined carefully for needs and essentially flat funded. The anticipated increased costs were contracted salaries, health insurance, Sanborn tuition, special education transportation, water treatment costs and special education tuition. They were able to decrease outside contracted services.

Castle stated that the Ellis School proposed budget for FY25 is \$8,332,185.87, which is an increase of \$162,886.89 or 1.99%. The Sanborn High School proposed budget for FY25 is \$5,360,457.33, which is an increase of \$873,214.00 or 19.46%. The entire proposed budget for FY25 is \$13,692,643.20, which is an increase of \$1,036,100.89 or 8.19%. He also reviewed the Warrant Articles that are being considered for March: 1. Elections, 2. Support Staff Contract, 3. Future High School, 4. School Operating Budget and 5. Transfer to Special Education Trust Fund.

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Halliday closed the presentation by stating this budget is realistic, which means it meets the needs of students and staff while considering the financial demands on Fremont taxpayers. While the budget is conservative, they feel that it addresses staffing needs and re-allocates funds appropriately. They welcome all questions, comments and suggestions.

Discussion on the Presentation of the School Budget - Muench and Fraize's seats are up for election this March. There are currently 5 out of district special education students, which is the reason for possibly having a Warrant Article to add to the Special Education Trust Funds from surplus funds. The Board asked if the School tracked home schooled and charter school students. Halliday stated that the charter students are easier to track. If someone is going to home school their child, they only need to inform the District once, they do not have to do this annually, which makes tracking them very difficult.

This proposed budget is eliminating one teacher. They have not made any decisions about which grade that would impact. There are a couple of teachers retiring, so one option is not to fill the position that will be vacated. Enrollment numbers, breakdown by grade and staffing were all reviewed.

When reviewing the detailed budget a few large highlights were regular education increases of sub pay rate (was 80 for teachers/70 for non-teachers, last year increased to 90/80 and this year is 100/90), health insurance, Sanborn Tuition, Teacher CBA. Regular education decreases in SST tuition and computer software. Special education increases of teacher CBA, Sanborn tuition, OOD tuition and support services. Special education decreases were; support turnover, support services and contracted services. One of the largest decreases was in combining the social worker and the Psychology and hiring someone in house full time. These positions used to be contracted out and were only available to our students 2 to 3 days a week. It was also different individuals that showed up. Combining these two positions and hiring an in-house person provided our students with one dedicated person 5 days a week at a decreased cost of about \$65,000. Castle also confirmed the staff are great at making sure CAD Aid is being used/requested.

Castle was asked if any money was coming back to the Town. He confirmed that they are giving money back. He didn't have the actual amount but estimated it to be approximately \$336,000. He will have the exact numbers at the next meeting.

Holmes asked why the increase to line 1270 was so high. Halliday stated that in prior years this line was not used and had no money in it. They need an ELS person, and this is a contracted person, not an in-house employee.

Trust fund accounts, balances and goals were reviewed. A discussion was held on why/when each fund would be used. Fraize explained the reason for starting the Tuition fund was because they used to add "ghost" students prior to the set up of the trust fund. This was to cover a student that moved into our District after the budget was voted on. The Board wanted to run a tighter budget, so the tuition trust fund covers any added student. Further discussion was held on special education and what emergencies would be. Enrollment numbers were discussed again along with the impact of 55 and over communities, as well as the housing limits.

There were a lot of discussions on the Sanborn Tuition, starting with the Warrant Article that will be going on the ballot for a new high school. Muench answered a lot of questions on how the School Board is hoping this will work. He stated that the School Board is not ready to vote on anything. They are in the process of negotiating with all four schools. Each school has different things to offer, which are all being reviewed in each contract. The schools are coming up with a formula in which we could figure out our cost. So, depending on how things come out, there may be one recommended school, or the District may have more than one to offer a choice for families. Muench stated that, although he cannot say for

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certain that the other Town or Towns that we choose will not put it on their ballot, it is his understanding that as long as the other Town is not expending funds it doesn't need to be voted on. The first class to be under this new contract, once signed, would be the freshman class of 2026. In addition, because there is no sibling agreement in the current contract, only students currently in Sanborn when the contract ends in 2026 would be allowed to continue there.

The default budget is over the proposed budget by \$19,447.87, this is due to the contract rules. Castle reviewed the estimated revenues and stated the lunch program was going well. He also confirmed that only part of the school is Title I.

There was a lengthy discussion on how Sanborn had determined our costs using the formula provided in the contract prior to the last 7 years. There came a point, in working with the last couple of Superintendents, that Sanborn realized how unfair those costs were for Fremont. They worked hard and closely with our Superintendents to come up with a fairer number. However, there are only two years left on the current contract and no guarantees Fremont will stay with Sanborn. This year, the School Board did notice that Sanborn has used the formula per the contract and is anticipating the same to follow for the remainder of the contract.

Cordes asked how some students were already going to different high schools that the Town was paying for. Halliday stated that parents can file for best interest reason or hardship circumstances which are reviewed and either granted or denied. Each type of request has guidelines and goes before different members of the administration.

Holmes asked the Committee to really review the detailed budget and submit all questions directly to Castle. Castle will answer them as well as have a printout of all questions and answers at the next meeting.

Next meeting dates: November 15 (first floor meeting room) and November 29 (basement meeting room)

Motion to adjourn was made by Holmes, seconded by Benson. Meeting adjourned at 8:15 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Shawn Perreault
Recording Secretary