

The meeting was called to order at 7:00 pm in the Basement Meeting Room at the Fremont Town Hall, 295 Main Street in Fremont by Chair Holmes. Present were Committee Members Mary Jo Holmes (Chair), Jon Benson (Vice Chair), Brenda Beauchain, Nancy Murray, Gordon Muench, Steve Bonaccorsi, Josh Yokela, Neal Janvrin (for the Select Board); Superintendent Ellen Halliday; Business Administrator Nathan Castle; and Recording Secretary Shawn Perreault.

Pledge of Allegiance was recited. Holmes acknowledge that Janvrin was sitting in for Cordes tonight.

Benson moved to approve meeting minutes of November 15, 2023 as presented. Muench seconded. Motion passed with a vote of 5 Yes, 0 No, 3 Abstain (Beauchain, Janvrin, Bonaccorsi).

School District Budget Review

Holmes started the review by asking if Sanborn's GMR has changed at all. Muench confirmed it is the same as presented.

An email to the School Board from Josh Yokela regarding the default budget (and NHMA information on default budgeting) was provided to the Committee. Halliday reminded the Committee that they do not have jurisdiction over the budgets. The Select Board has jurisdiction over the Town budget and the School Board has it over the School District budget. Any questions may be submitted to either Board by a citizen questioning the numbers but not from the Budget Committee. The School Board will be reviewing Yokela's email concerning the default budget and the related numbers and get back to Yokela as soon as they are able to review the information with the school attorney.

In Yokela's email, he provides some answers from NHMA and the RSA's he was questioning was applied correctly. Yokela also corrected something he misstated last time, that some of the numbers wouldn't match due to percentages changing or raises. An example would be the unemployment percentages changing from year to year. Yokela also questioned the definition of an eliminated position as opposed to a redefined position.

Halliday stated they would be reviewing everything with the School Board, but they have every confidence that Castle has been following the laws and making the correct calculations.

Discussion was held on the Sanborn Contract regarding GMR and services. Benson asked if Sanborn decreased any other services along with the large increase to the GMR. Muench stated the only thing that has changed is the GMR, everything else in the contract was being followed. Bonaccorsi felt the reason behind Sanborn following the GMR formula this year was due to the uncertainty that Fremont would be re-signing a contract with them, and they are trying to have some stability if that happens. Castle gave an example of last year's GMR, which was 5% but could have been 15% had Sanborn chosen to go strictly by the contracted formula. Benson asked what would happen if we broke the contract. Muench stated that has been looked into a number of times and Fremont would owe Sanborn the entire remaining amount on the contract, which they would sue us for. Discussions on School choice based on hardship, educational needs and parent EFA were held.

Muench reminded the Budget Committee that the School Board is working extremely hard with the four schools who submitted, negotiating on behalf of Fremont. There are a lot of items on the table and very little they are legally allowed to say at this point. There are a lot of discussions on Facebook, in which they are legally prevented from commenting on using numbers that are publicly available. However, these are things that are negotiated on and can change depending on what the parties come up with.

Halliday and Castle stated one of the items they are hoping to change in the new school contract is when the GMR is due. They are hoping to move it from December to September.

Janvrin believes the Warrant Articles for the Town will be completed by the November 30th Select Board meeting.

Castle stated that one question was submitted to him, which was read and answered as follows:

1. Where did the facilities projects money come from? **The various safety upgrades came from ESSER III. The sprinkler system replacements were from ESSER III and the operating budget. The carpet replacement and paving came from end of year funds and from the FY 23 budget but paid for in FY 24.**

Discussion was held on pending projects and the maintenance of the building. How the maintenance was funded and the differences in budgeted maintenance as opposed to the Maintenance Trust Funds being used. Clarification was also given by Muench on money that comes back to the district taxpayers. If any money is left in the Sanborn Tuition line that entire amount goes back to the district taxpayers. On top of that, if there are funds left over in the Ellis budget and anything that the School Board determines cannot wait is taken out, whatever is left is added to the Sanborn Tuition money and returned to the district.

Holmes asked the Committee to please review all the Town and the School budget information. She wants the members to make sure they leave no questions unanswered. In prior years, the Committee has re-reviewed some budgets and made amendments. She reviewed the documents that were provided to the Committee from Carlson, including information regarding the upcoming Candidate Declaration period and process, and the working Capital Improvement Plan.

Yokela, in doing a quick review of the Capital Improvement Plan, brought a math error in the School District line to the Committee's attention. Holmes will inform Carlson and ask that the numbers be reviewed to make sure the rest are correct, and the school's number is corrected.

An updated copy of the Town Warrant was circulated for review and discussion at a future meeting.

Next meeting date: December 6 (main floor meeting room) will be used for the Town, December 13 (basement meeting room) will be used as a work meeting and December 20th the School will be back with their final budget and hopefully any correction to the default that may be needed, all will start at 7:00 pm.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:20 pm with a motion by Bonaccorsi, second by Yokela.

Respectfully submitted,

Shawn Perreault
Recording Secretary