

PUBLIC HEARING of the Town Council held Thursday, May 26, 2004 at 7:00 o'clock P.M. in the Burrillville High School Auditorium, 425 East Ave., Harrisville, for and within the Town of Burrillville.

MEMBERS PRESENT: Council President Wallace F. Lees; Councilors Jacqueline Zahn, Nancy F. Binns, Margaret L. Dudley, Ronald E. Faford and William E. Gonyea.

MEMBERS ABSENT: Councilor William A. Andrews was excused due to a business commitment.

Council President Wallace F. Lees acknowledged the presence of Vice Chairman Paul Couture, Dorothy Cardon, and Peter Lambert of the School Committee and Barbara A. VonVillas, Ph.D., Superintendent of Schools.

Relative to discussing the School Budget

NOTE: The public hearing was duly advertised in the Local Section of the Woonsocket Call on May 9, 12, and 16, 2005.

Comments from Mary Karmozyn, Chair, Burrillville School Committee

Paul Couture, Vice Chair of the School Committee, noted that Mrs.

Karmozyn was unable to attend, due to a death in the family. He read the following into the record on her behalf:

As the chair of the Burrillville School Committee, I am here to say that education in Burrillville is alive and well. Two of our schools were commended by the Board of Regents; four of our schools are high performing. Each of our schools gives a lot of attention to reading so all our children can succeed. And we start our youngest children off with all day kindergarten, which builds a strong foundation – just as milk builds strong bones – throughout later life.

We've made progress in leaps and bounds and we are proud of our achievement. But all of this is in danger.

As you give consideration to all of the citizens, I ask you to remember the children. They cannot help themselves. They depend on us to support them. The responsibility of the leadership is to do what is right, not what is easy, but what is right.

Comments from Barbara A. VonVillas, Ph.D., Superintendent of the Burrillville School Department

In February, 2005, the Burrillville School Committee approved a Proposed FY 06 Budget of \$26,977,083. This proposed Budget, which represented a 10.86% increase, was intended to maintain all current programs as well as include all contracted salaries and anticipated

increases in fixed expenses.

Following a period of adjustment that included meetings with Administrators as well as firmer figures from Blue Cross and other insurers, the FY 06 Budget was reduced to \$25,987,584, which represented a 6.8% increase. To get to 6.8%, the School Department made the following reductions:

1 \$ 328,000 Personnel

2 \$ 72,000 Retirements of top step teachers

3 \$ 45,000 Transferring part of a position to a grant

4 \$ 230,000 Reduction in Blue Cross rates and unemployment

5 \$ 58,000 Elimination of funds for building repairs and communications

6 \$ 88,000 Reductions of student services lines, including tuition

7 \$ 75,000 Increase to the bottom line by projected carryover

8 \$ 150,000 5-year averaging of the savings in the salaries and benefits lines

Factoring in an increase of \$58,000 for Workmen's Compensation and Coaches' Longevity, the 6.8% Budget was the result of close to a million dollars in reductions.

The Town Manager is recommending a 4.69% Budget, which represents substantial additional cuts to already depleted resources.

He has asked for a prioritized list identifying where the School Department would make additional reductions. The list is as follows, ranked in the order of importance identified by the Administrators, the top of the list being the first to go and the bottom being the most important to keep:

Proposed Reduction Impact Savings Rank

HIPPY Tutors (3-5 yr olds) Eliminate program \$ 15,000 1

Equipment repair (custodial and kitchen equipment, vehicles) Keep \$10,000 \$ 10,000 2

BHS Advisors Keep \$14,405 \$ 5,000 3

Technology funds Empty the line \$ 25,000 4

Facilities repair Keep \$15,000 \$ 45,000 5

Art/Music/or Spec Ed Eliminate position \$ 56,348 6

Custodian Elimination per seniority \$ 49,526 7

TA Elimination per seniority \$ 38,595 8

3 Secretaries Elimination per seniority \$112,874 9

Tech Info Specialists Reduce by approx. 1/3 time \$ 9,500 10

BMS & Elementary Athletics Eliminate \$ 25,290 11

BHS English Elimination of electives \$ 55,508 12

1 Elementary Teacher Increased class size (dependent on enrollment) \$ 63,759 13

Counselor Eliminate position (BMS) \$ 79,290 14

Eliminate or reduce All Day K Potential loss of grant funds, increased bussing \$97,219 - \$110,743 15

In the event that the above positions are eliminated, the potential cost of unemployment will increase the budget by \$62,932.

The School Department recognizes the responsibilities of the Town Manager and the Town Council to satisfy the needs of all its citizens. But the future of the Town is with its children. Unless our children are provided with educational opportunity through adequate resources, they will not be able to join the ranks of those who now pay the taxes that support the Town, and the taxpayer burden will increase.

Current taxpayers were once the children of the Town. If their elders didn't bear the burden of educating them, they themselves would not have the resources to pay those taxes.

Earlier generations were not any richer than this generation. Taxes were a burden then, and they are a burden now. But in America, we all share the burden of supporting those who are the most needy. That is what we are all about.

In Burrillville, as in every community in this State, the children are in the most need of our support. They are our future and, like good and loving parents, we sacrifice our time and our money so that they can do better than we did. We cannot make the mistake of believing that "good enough" is good enough.

Dr. Von Villas asked that the principals be allowed to speak. Council President Wallace F. Lees agreed.

Richard Trogisch, Principal of Burrillville High School, said that over a four-year period, eleven positions have been lost and the number of electives offered has been reduced yearly. Mr. Trogisch discussed 2006 scheduling and stated the opinion that the high school may not be able to fully schedule students. Mr. Trogisch discussed the difficulties in meeting the requirements of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) without an appropriate budget line. The result, he said, might be that students may not graduate or may require a five year program to complete the graduation requirements. Additionally, Mr. Trogisch supported all day kindergarten as the highest priority of the school department.

Laurie Sullivan, Principal of the A.T. Levy School, supported all day kindergarten as the foundation of future learning and spoke of how the elimination of the program would result in difficulty in meeting the requirement for reading proficiency by the third grade. Ms. Sullivan discussed the number of aids in other school departments and pointed out that the A.T. Levy School has one building aid.

Note: Council President Wallace F. Lees noted that Raymond Trinque and Joan Cote of the Burrillville School Committee had arrived.

Karen Ostroff, Principal of the W.L. Callahan School, spoke of the

excellence of the school department, staff and administration and discussed the burden put on staff and administration by the reductions in counseling, social work, nursing staff, etc. Ms. Ostroff said that no textbooks had been purchased in four to five years, discussed the obsolescence of social studies books and explained the implications of the situation.

Ken Rassler, Principal of the Steere Farm Elementary School, spoke of the decrease in the population of teachers and increase in the student population over a four-year timeframe. Mr. Rassler said the result has been an increased class size and a decrease in one-on-one time between teachers and students. Mr. Rassler supported all day kindergarten as one of the most important school department programs. Mr. Rassler said that cuts in the nursing and counseling positions have hurt the schools.

Lois Short, Assistant Principal of Burrillville High School, spoke of eleven people lost at the high school: five due to decreased enrollment, six which cannot be attributed to decreased enrollment. Ms. Short explained the affect on the schedule and the possibility that students may have insufficient credits to graduate. Ms. Short discussed the need for students to achieve in fulfillment of the State's accountability testing. Ms. Short supported the all day kindergarten program in preparing students for State testing that they will face in later years. In closing, Ms. Short spoke of the life-long impact when students are unable to take classes of their choosing.

Raymond Trinque, School Committee member, spoke of his son's scheduling problems because classes related to his major interests may not be offered in 2006. Mr. Trinque indicated that elected officials are responsible for this situation because of cutting to a point where education is being affected. Mr. Trinque said that for a number of years the Town Council and Town Manager have linked school funding with achievement of excellence. He spoke of the good record of performance at the Burrillville Schools, the quality of building maintenance, high expectations and high achievement. Mr. Trinque suggested that further budget cuts can be made but that the results would be mediocre performance.

Peter Lambert, School Committee member, said that in each of his seven years' involvement with the School Committee, a budget proposal has been submitted and a lower recommendation is made. Mr. Lambert attributed budget problems to mandatory State and Federal programs that are not funded at that level.

Comments from the Budget Board

Arthur R. Hurley, Chairman of the Burrillville Budget Board, discussed the percentage increase in the school department's budget in recent years. Mr. Hurley said that the recommended 4.9 percent increase in the FY 2006 school department equals \$1,141,399. Mr. Hurley suggested that only the school department could control how

they spend their budget and that it might be necessary for the school department to realign some budgetary items to achieve their goals. Mr. Hurley spoke of the apparent contradiction between: comments of a decrease in staff and a budget that includes increased staff; a bond for school renovations and a budget that reduces building maintenance; and increases in staffing and declining enrollment. Mr. Hurley said that teachers needed to be adequately compensated but suggested that the current budget proposal should be sufficient not only to maintain the buildings but also to pay teachers sufficiently.

Mark Brizard, Budget Board member, observed that taxpayers ask a lot of the administrators and school committee: not only do they expect that the children be educated but they also expect the school committee to control their budget. Mr. Brizard noted that salaries and benefits rise while student programs diminish. He suggested that there are reasons for the problems, but that there are also solutions. Mr. Brizard spoke of the importance of textbooks as a tool for parents to support their children's' education and the value of a compromise in wage increases that might result in retaining staff. Mr. Brizard spoke of the impact of maintenance of effort, the increases in the annual budgets, and suggested that, while the school administration had done a good job with education, they have done less well with the department's finances.

Comments from Michael C. Wood, Town Manager

Michael C. Wood, Town Manager, said that the proposed budget was not final, but that there are always some adjustments made as the end of the fiscal year approaches. Mr. Wood said that the Town Council has always made whatever concessions are possible to assist the schools when it becomes known whether additional funds will be available from the State. Mr. Wood described the budget process: he said that the Budget Board proposal exceeded the 5.5 percent cap required by the State. He explained the adjustments that his proposal included to fall within that requirement, pointing out that he did not further reduce the school department's budget from the Budget Board's recommendation.

Michael C. Wood, Town Manager, reviewed data from the Department of Education that indicated that during a five-year period (1999 – 2004) the Burrillville School Department has experienced a ten percent decrease in enrollment; that per pupil spending has gone from \$7,600 to \$10,391; and that the average annual increase exceed one million dollars.

Mr. Wood said that State law requires that the budget stay within a five and one-half percent increase and that the Town has successfully met this requirement. Mr. Wood stressed the importance of the school committee, administration, teachers, parents and students understanding that the school budget, which is eighty percent of the entire budget, has a tremendous impact on the overall budget and, ultimately, on the tax levy. Mr. Wood discussed the importance of

recognizing this impact, as well as State requirements, when establishing programs, wages and making financial decisions. Mr. Wood said that an effort is made to accommodate the needs of the schools, but suggested that the schools must also be aware of the affect of their expenditures.

Mr. Wood repeated that it might be possible to make changes to the budget at the end of the fiscal year, but that it would be difficult. He suggested that everyone involved should understand consequences and manage contracts and programs with that in mind.

Public Comment

Note: Persons who wish to address the Council shall state their name and address.

Roland Huguenin, 2175 Douglas Pike, commented that there had been a substantial decrease in school enrollment but that the taxpayers were expected to increase the school budget by approximately one million dollars each year, regardless of the enrollment. Mr. Huguenin questioned the statement that kindergarten is a requirement and pointed out that some children begin school at three or four years old. Mr. Huguenin asserted that there is a difference between the State requirements and local practice.

Roland Huguenin, 2175 Douglas Pike, pointed out that teachers are

not required to be Town residents. He felt that they should not be allowed to speak at the public hearing unless they were residents and registered voters in the Town of Burrillville. Council President Wallace F. Lees noted that the principals of the schools had been allowed to speak on behalf of their schools. Mr. Huguenin opposed the process, suggesting that people who were not residents had no right to try to influence the taxpayers.

Paul Conway, Sanwood Drive, opposed any reduction in music in the schools and raised concerns that the possible reductions identified by Dr. VonVillas including eliminating a position in the music department. Mr. Conway suggested that the school department pays little of the expense associated with the music program and that its elimination would not result in savings. Mr. Conway spoke of the possibility of students leaving the Burrillville school system to seek music education elsewhere, at the expense of the Town.

Desiree Meinville, Oakland, said that she spoke on behalf of her parents and students at the high school. Ms. Meinville spoke of many classes being eliminated, including some advanced placement (AP) classes, making it difficult for students to complete their schedules. Ms. Meinville said that the situation threatens the graduation status of some students and affects the class rank of others. She pointed out that she would be taking classes at the Community College of Rhode Island to supplement her education and voiced concerns over the expense and students who might want to take such courses but

could not afford them.

Ms. Meinville acknowledged that funds are limited but suggested that eliminating classes would not be an appropriate solution. She suggested that fundraisers could be conducted for supplies while budget funds could be reserved for salaries. Ms. Meinville suggested that financial aid should be available for students who would be taking summer classes.

Donald Howard, 1425 Jackson Schoolhouse Road, asked: if the budget was so tight, how did the School Committee find money to remove a principal? Dr. VonVillas declined to discuss personnel matters.

Michael Smith of Reservoir Road suggested that elimination of AP classes and extra curricular activities would take the means to college out of the students' hands. Mr. Smith discussed specific AP classes that have been eliminated, the affect those changes may have on his grade point average (GPA) and the limitations of the world language department. Mr. Smith suggested that the Town Council should conduct an audit to analyze the school budget to see if the cuts to classes and school personnel are necessary.

Mindy Smith of Reservoir Road supported the comments of Ms. Meinville and Mr. Smith. Ms. Smith, a student at Brown University, said that without AP classes, students would have no hope. Ms.

Smith discussed the impact of inflation on the budget that must be taken into account.

Susan Kent, 50 Benedict Road, read the excerpts from an article called Drunken School Spending by Frederick Hess, which she said had appeared in The American Enterprise. Ms. Kent quoted data related to American schools being well-funded, discussed increases in funding through the years, compared U.S. schools to other nations' schools, discussed increases in staffing and suggesting that increasing funding would not address problems in the schools.

Ms. Kent referenced a Providence Journal article, saying that Rhode Island has high per student spending, high teachers' salaries, the high percentage of students listed as special education, and the fifth highest tax burden in the nation. Ms. Kent said that, while everyone likes to have many wonderful things, the taxpayers cannot afford it.

Ms. Kent spoke about the all day kindergarten program, suggesting that if "something has to give" she would prefer to see funds used for high achievers (such as the AP students present). Ms. Kent supported cutting Burrillville High School advisors, acknowledged that the problem is not only local, but nationwide, and urged that funds be spent wisely.

Jeanne Duquette, 80 North Hill Road, suggested that there were two opposing philosophies represented. She spoke of the planning,

goal-setting and vision of the School Committee and Town Council, which are the basis for developing budgets. Ms. Duquette said that schools reflect the society, and as society changes the schools must adapt. Ms. Duquette spoke of wanting the best for the children in town, the good education that her children received in the school department, and the difficulties involved in seeing that they did receive a good education. She addressed budget increases, equating those to the high price of living in Rhode Island. Ms. Duquette supported working together and setting priorities for the school department.

Matthew Trimble, Budget Board member, said that every Town deals with the similar problems and while everyone in the Town wants what's best for the children, there is only a certain amount of money available and there is a limitation on the amount taxes can increase. Decisions must be made by the administrators, he said, and suggested that the appropriate approach would be to begin meeting and discussing solutions. He noted that the Town Council and School Committee had met in workshop session and suggested that such sessions could be the basis for problem solving. Mr. Trimble referred to the principals' comments about the possibility that students might have insufficient credits to graduate after four years, the importance of understanding the impact of decisions made in the past, and supported open communication to meaningfully address the financial situation.

Chuck Boucher, 55 Hemlock Farm Trail, spoke of his career as a teacher in the Burrillville School Department and specifically about his efforts in building a technology program that included 18 courses.

Mr. Boucher said that two technology positions had been eliminated (during the 2004/2005 school year), resulting in the elimination of eleven courses. Mr. Boucher said that for the upcoming year a retirement at the Middle School which would not be filled would result in long term impact on the technology department. Mr. Boucher voiced concerns about eliminating programs that heighten students' awareness of career paths, students' inability to take the electives that they want, and that the needs of those students who do not go to college may not be addressed. This trend, he suggested, would ill equip students for competing in the global market. Mr. Boucher said that, while financial and salary issues may be legitimate, the goal is to offer the best possible education to our children. Mr. Boucher said that continuing cuts would take away courses that keep many students enrolled in school. He spoke of the difficulty students have in taking sufficient credits, spoke of specific courses that have been eliminated and the impact on the students. Mr. Boucher suggested that the long-term cost to the Town would be substantially more if students were not provided with skills appropriate for survival in a technical world.

Jack Hodys of 185 Donahue Road suggested that the education system has a big effect on property values. Mr. Hodys suggested that a compromise that would devastate neither the municipal nor the

school side (of the budget) should be considered. Mr. Hodys said that the current proposal would increase taxes an average of \$127.00 per homeowner and suggested that an additional \$50.00 would not put people out of their homes. Michael C. Wood, Town Manager, pointed out that the Town Council has no choice: they cannot exceed the 5.5 percent cap. Therefore, he said, it would not be possible to increase taxes to that level. Mr. Hodys recommended petitioning the State for permission to exceed the cap.

Desiree Meinville of Oakland acknowledged those speakers who supported her comments, concurred with Chuck Boucher's statements, and spoke of the importance of college to many students.

Arthur Hurley, Chairman, Burrillville Budget Board, responded to Mr. Hodys' comments about exceeding the 5.5 percent cap, stating that it is not possible and would not be allowed by the State. Mr. Hurley also addressed the many comments about the budget cuts in the school department, stating that there have been no cuts but that the current budget proposal includes an increase of 1.1 million dollars.

Desiree Meinville of Oakland asked whether fundraisers could be conducted to address supply costs. Raymond Trinque, School Committee member, said that fundraising is an important part of public education but should not take the place of proper funding. Mr. Trinque went on to discuss that one of the problems is that Rhode

Island does not have a funding formula for education, a situation that prevents long-term planning.

Councilor Jacqueline Zahn explained that the Town Council is responsible for the bottom-line budget figure for the School Department, but that it is not the role of the Council to make specific cuts. She said that the School Committee is responsible for line-item adjustments, as she believed they should be.

Paul Conway of Sanwood Drive expanded on his comments related to music programs. Mr. Conway said that elimination of the music program would impact the community because there would be no band for homecoming, graduation, Veterans' parades, etc. Mr. Conway asked who had recommended that the music program be cut.

Dr. Barbara A. VonVillas, Superintendent of Schools, said that there had been no recommendation to cut the music program. She said that the list mentioned earlier reflected a prioritization of what could be but cut to achieve the proposed budget. Raymond Trinke, member of the School Committee, pointed out that the music program had never been cut during his tenure, that there was no sentiment to cut or change the music program and he made a commitment to no cuts in the program.

Desiree Meinville of Oakland voiced a concern that some parents might remove their children from the school system.

Francis Chartier of Harrisville Main St. said that he was tired of hearing about cuts in the school department. He supported keeping people working and keeping children in schools. Mr. Chartier thought it was important not to cut programs for young children.

Mark Brizard, member of the Budget Board, challenged the School Committee to help Ms. Meinville run fundraising programs.

Town Council Member Comments/Input

Council Jacqueline Zahn acknowledged the parents present and thanked them for attending the hearing.

Michael C. Wood, Town Manager, challenged people to look at things differently. Mr. Wood discussed the School's responsibilities for their budget, suggesting that it would be necessary to find a way to make reductions because an increase in State funding is not guaranteed. Mr. Wood spoke of the Town's commitment to education, pointing to the large percentage of the entire budget spent on education, but said that not all appeals can be met due to financial and legal restrictions. Mr. Wood said that he and the Town Council would do their best to find additional funds, but suggested that school administration, teachers and parents might have to make concessions to provide desired programs. Mr. Wood detailed measures that have affected the budget, discussed the roles of the Council/Manager and School Committee/School Administration.

Barbara A. VonVillas, Ph.D., discussed the budget process, stating that the proposal was not the final budget. She said that the Town Council has traditionally supported the School Department whenever they could. Dr. VonVillas said that her earlier comments reviewed the worst-case scenario, but said that she did not anticipate that situation would happen.

On behalf of the School Committee, School Administration, Town Council, Town Manager and the Clerk, Council President Wallace F. Lees thanked those present for their participation. Council President Lees voiced disappointment that there were so few participants.

VOTED to close the public hearing

Motion by Councilor Jacqueline Zahn. Seconded by Councilor Ronald E. Faford. The motion was unanimous by the six members present. Voting in favor of the motion were Council President Wallace F. Lees, Councilors Jacqueline Zahn, Nancy F. Binns, Margaret L. Dudley, Ronald E. Faford and William E. Gonyea. Councilor William A. Andrews was excused.

VOTED to adjourn at 9:00 P.M.

Motion by Councilor William E. Gonyea. Seconded by Councilor Ronald E. Faford. The motion was unanimous by the six members present. Voting in favor of the motion were Council President

Wallace F. Lees, Councilors Jacqueline Zahn, Nancy F. Binns, Margaret L. Dudley, Ronald E. Faford and William E. Gonyea. Councilor William A. Andrews was excused.

The meeting was taped. The tape is on file with the minutes.

Louise R. Phaneuf, Town Clerk