

Town of Lincoln

Budget Board Meeting

February 9, 2006

Members Present:

Claudette Lussier Linda Noble Carl Brunetti Roberta Gosselin

Greg Leonard Bob Ericson Ken Booth Joe Dziobek

Cheryl Ethier Jack Newman Mary Varr

No members were absent.

The meeting was called to order at 7:05 and the Pledge of Allegiance was led by Claudette Lussier who was acting as Budget Board Chair as both the Chairman and Vice Chair were not present at the time.

Greg Leonard made a motion to change the agenda for the meeting so that Jeff Weiss would be able to make his presentation regarding the school budget at the beginning of the meeting.

Carl Brunetti seconded the motion, and the presentation was put first by unanimous vote.

The following are highlights of the presentation:

In the auditorium at the middle/high school, there are currently 3 advisory sections that meet simultaneously during one period, 2 sections of adaptive physical therapy, drama workshops, study halls,

and band practices that prohibit the use of the space altogether at some times.

Carl Brunetti asked what had become of the suggestion that the stage be extended. Jeff Weiss replied that when that idea was looked into, it was not cost effective to do so because it would only add on about 2 feet of space.

In the cafeteria, they currently have occupational and physical therapy for part of the day, which brings confidentiality and privacy concerns, and there are also advisory periods for which it is used.

In the middle/high school library, there are middle school classes being taught, reading classes, diagnostic testing, and advisory periods.

There are some computer labs that are used as academic space only because the space is needed.

Physical education teaching spaces include hallways, and the athletic trainer is currently using the emergency stairwell which is sure to be a fire code violation.

Some noted spaces that are missing and are needed are:

-Since it is not possible to suspend students for longer than 10 days now, there is a need for long-term placement areas. There is currently one area for this, but it is only large enough for approximately one

student.

-Industrial arts elective classroom space

-Student exhibition space as well as storage and display areas.

-Transitional space for 18-21 year old students who are graduating from the Special Education program. This is currently combined with the life skills classes.

-De-escalation space for the alternative learning program

-2 art rooms are currently shared by 3 teachers.

It was also noted that study halls will be eliminated by the 2007-2008 school year.

The proposal was as follows:

-The modular classrooms would stay where they are.

-Most teachers will have their own rooms

- There would be office and conference space as well as a 4-room suite for conference purposes.

-Special Education would gain 8 classrooms, 2 would be rented out to Northern RI Collaborative. This would expand the Special Ed. Program and allow some students to come back into the district.

Cheryl Ethier asked if the proposed uses would use all of the available space left by the middle school moving. Jeff Weiss said that all of the space would be used and still not all teachers would have their own rooms.

The modular classrooms would remain classrooms for the most part,

but 2 would be converted to office space.

Utilization of rooms would be 5 of 7 periods.

The high school currently has 1 administrator per 375 students which ranks 21st out of 32 communities, but if an additional one were added, it would make Lincoln 9th out of the 32.

Carl Brunetti asked if the figures mentioned included the anticipated Northern RI Collaborative students who will be brought in. It does not because it is unclear how many students that would be.

The middle school currently has 1 administrator per 413 students, which ranks 11 out of 13 communities. If an additional one were added, it would make Lincoln 5th out of 13.

It was noted that the level of “incidents” reported doubled and also the number of arrests in the first half of this year. An incident could be anything from a call from a parent to an arrest made, etc.

There are 2 resource police officers at the middle/high school.

Bob Ericson asked if there was a student mediation program in place. Mediation has not been run in 2 years and was not really active when it was in place.

Linda Noble asked if the arrest numbers indicated certain students being arrested more than once. They were indeed the total number of arrests and not the number of students arrested, so some students

were arrested more than once.

64% of the incidents and 100% of the arrests that have taken place this year have been at the high school level and not the middle school level, however the belief is that the new middle school would warrant a student resource officer present and the plan would be to take one of the two that are currently at the middle/high school and put them in the new middle school, leaving the high school with one. If the situation indicated that it was necessary, the idea would be to put an additional part-time student resource officer at the high school.

A Dean of Students was also found to be effective.

School Superintendent John Tindall-Gibson stated that violence is escalating in all school systems and that they are less able to be proactive without a Dean of Students.

The schools would like an additional high school administrator to work with the more difficult students and a middle school administrator to work with the 6th graders specifically.

In regards to health care for the schools, they hired Michael Dumas of Park Row as a consultant to figure out the best route. They put in bids to Blue Cross and United for health care and also self-insured options.

The outcome was that Blue Cross gave a rate of a 5% increase which was the best offer and it ended up being less potential exposure to go

with their plan rather than self-insure.

It was noted that the bid process did save the town \$250,000.

Bob Ericson noted that they should be doing things to lower exposure in the long run, like yearly check-ups that can detect health issues earlier and eventually save a lot of money.

Jeff Weiss noted that they are becoming more educated on that idea and are discussing such things with the union.

Energy savings ideas came from Honeywell and there were also educational energy incentives.

Honeywell offers performance-based solutions which are financed through state aid reimbursements and energy savings.

Educational energy incentives use a behavior modification approach and require someone to be an Energy Manager. The fees are paid with energy savings and the savings are guaranteed to cover the program cost.

Angelo Mennucci, Head of Maintenance, stated that the biggest savings will come in reviewing savings during unoccupied times.

The Auditor General's Office has stated that building a new school does not qualify as an automatic reason to receive permission by way of emergency to exceed the cap, but something like the large population increase that made the school necessary may qualify.

The schools, in that case, need to provide historical data, documentation and justify in writing why they need to exceed the cap

for that reason.

The schools received an additional \$482,000 in state aid which is shown in the new budget.

Jeff Weiss and the School Committee had concluded their presentation, and the Budget Board continued their meeting.

The minutes of January 26th were distributed for review.

The football field mentioned was the practice field and the School Committee presented their budget to the Budget Board, not the sub-committee.

Bob Ericson made a motion to approve, seconded by Linda Noble.

The minutes were approved as amended by a vote of 8-0 with Roberta Gosselin, Greg Leonard and Jack Newman abstaining because they were not present.

The next Budget Board meeting will be on February 15th at 7:00 pm where the Town Administrator will present her recommended 2006-2007 budget.

The Budget Board welcomed public comment and questions.

Benny Sisto asked if the Budget Board had looked into the recent issue that stated that open meetings did not allow the public to converse with the committees except for certain stipulations.

Ken Booth stated that as long as the item discussed is on the agenda

for the meeting, it can be discussed.

Town Councilman Keith Macksoud noted that items not on the agenda can be discussed as long as they are not acted upon in that meeting.

Linda Noble noted that the cost of utilities for the current middle/high school building would be the same if all the space was used, but then there would also be the costs of running the new middle school.

The idea for the modular classrooms was that once the new middle school was built, they would either be resold or moved to the elementary schools to alleviate some crowding. The idea now is that they don't believe they would structurally survive a move.

Roberta Gosselin stated that she would reconcile the audited numbers to the actual numbers and that the management letter has not been approved by the Town Council yet.

Bob Ericson noted that the costs of running the current middle/high school building to run it at 70% capacity (each room used 5 of 7 periods).

Also, it was suggested that the Budget Board find out how much it costs to heat the modular classrooms per square foot.

Linda Noble noted that it was idealistic and impractical to have every teacher have their own room.

Bob Ericson noted that student-based mediation could be very helpful and he suggested that they find out more information on that to implement it in the middle and high schools.

Jack Newman noted that instead of lowering the percent increase in the projected budget, the schools are already trying to figure out ways to exceed the cap by going through the Auditor General. He did note that the final decision to do so would have to come from the Town Administration.

Ken Booth noted that an expanded Special Education area would allow some students to come back in district and would save some money.

The Budget Board once again entertained public comment and questions.

Benny Sisto noted that student resource officers are effective, but he did feel that there should not be even one arrest at the high school level.

Benny asked about the status of the performance audit.

Ken Booth noted that it is in Phase 1 currently, and in the Town Council's hands.

Town Councilor Macksoud stated that it did go to bid, a part was completed and the results did cause some money to be spent to fix some suggestions. The results were publicly presented.

There will be a new bid going out for an updated audit.

The audit also ties in with the management letter because some of the suggestions were already in the management letters.

Benny was concerned that the School Department still does not have a Bookkeeper.

Joe Dziobek noted that there was a special request in to have a Special Financial Town Meeting on March 30th.

Town Councilor Macksoud stated that this was to discuss the practice football field to get it moved sooner so that it can be played on by August. He did believe that it would be a one-issue meeting.

Ken Booth noted that it may be the intention to have a one-issue meeting, but there is always the possibility of resolutions getting on the agenda by way of Council, Administration, or taxpayer signatures. 100 signatures would be needed and would have to be certified by the Town Clerk before the FTM.

Richard Foster wanted to know if the student resource officers were still being paid for by the special program that first placed them at the school, and did note that discipline problems with children have been rising in recent years.

Town Councilor Macksoud noted that even though there was about \$1 million in revenue from Lincoln Park, there was also about \$800,000 in abatements of property taxes due to a change in the

homestead exemption so the total revenues were not as high as they seemed.

Jack Newman made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Greg Leonard seconded the motion.

The meeting adjourned at 9:05.