

Ludlow-Mount Holly Unified Union School District Special Meeting Minutes

January 15, 2020

MHS Library

I. CALL TO ORDER:

Board: Paul Orzechowski, Mary Alberty, Kelly Tarbell, Katie Hollebeek, Brigid Faenza, Courtney McGuire, Dan Buckley, Mariel Meringolo (arrived 6:55 p.m.)

Student Representatives:

Staff: Meg Powden, Karen Trimboli, Cheryl Hammond, Craig Hutt Vater, RayeLynn Collins, Lauren Baker

Public: Dave Venter, Dave Johnson

Mr. Orzechowski called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m. He invited the board members to introduce themselves

II. APPROVAL OF AGENDA:

Ms. Alberty **moved** to approve the agenda. Ms. Hollebeek seconded. Mr. Orzechowski advised that he needed to add an executive session after next meeting, and the annual warning under old business after the budget discussion. The amended motion carried unanimously.

III. APPROVAL OF MINUTES:

A. January 8, 2020, Regular Meeting

Ms. Alberty **moved** to approve the January 8, 2020 minutes. Ms. Tarbell seconded and the motion carried unanimously. There was discussion about the December 12 minutes not being included in this packet but they would need to be added to the next meeting agenda. Ms. Wilson advised that she had sent the revised minutes to the board members when she sent the January 8 minutes.

IV. COMMUNICATIONS:

A. Board Comments

Mr. Orzechowski advised that the snow in the future is good.

B. Student Comments

None.

C. Public Comments

Mr. Venter

V. OLD BUSINESS:

A. FY2021 Proposed Budget 4th Draft

Ms. Hammond advised that she has been to a few meetings recently and there is a 4.1 version. The biggest dilemma has been whether or not they would offer transportation. The town's "sweetheart deal" was that they would pay \$1 for the bus and the bus driver and the town would maintain the bus. The insurance company advised that the bus would need to meet all the needs of a "school bus". The offer was renegotiated as the school will pay for the driver and the town still operates the municipal bus system. She read aloud the email from Scott Murphy. The town would be responsible for the costs of the bus, while the school would be responsible for the bus driver

expenses. The board felt this was a very generous offer. He has also been instructed to work with the school district to provide transportation for the coming school year.

Ms. Hammond shared the information about the various options. This latest would mean a change in the assessment. Ms. Hammond advised that she had put the extra into a reserve since this is a one-year deal for Ludlow and they would need a solution for next year. The Mt. Holly bus and driver would be the same as expected. This option would reflect a difference of about \$40,000 in the assessment. This option also includes the bus becoming “school bus compliant”. This also includes about \$11,000 in a reserve. Ms. Trimboli and Mr. Hutt Vater will work with the driver on the route.

Ms. Hammond advised that the TRSU board met Monday and the vote on the budget didn’t pass. Part of the reason that the GM board members voted it down was because they wanted their board to see it first. At the GM meeting the GM board advised that the TRSU budget was acceptable to them, except a few changes. Ms. Hammond advised that the GM board felt that the superintendent, the executive assistant needed to be 1.0 (from .8 fte) and the tech director needed to be back to .8 fte (from .6 fte). This reflects an overall increase of 7.58%.

Ms. Hammond advised that the LMH budget is now just a few cents under the penalty threshold. This is version 4.1. This budget reflects the increases discussed at the recent GM meeting—1.0 superintendent, 1.0 executive assistant, and .8 tech director. It also includes some reserve funds. Mr. Buckley advised that this budget plans for Ludlow canceling transportation so they are making a step toward the future. Next year they can make the next step, which may be paying off the Ludlow debt for the bus. There was discussion about the board being aware that the transportation was going to stop from Ludlow, but it was just too much of a jump this year.

Ms. Tarbell suggested that there would be a benefit to having a finance committee that meets a couple times per year that meets with outside stakeholders. Ms. Hammond advised that last year, the GM finance committee vetted the budget, but then the whole board re-asked every question since they weren’t all privy to the budget discussions. Ms. Tarbell suggested that this could be a fluid committee and invite board members who have a particular comment about a particular finance expense.

Ms. Powden reported that the GM board held a retreat and developed priorities that they wanted in the budget. Mr. Venter questioned the state transportation aid being zero in the budget. Ms. Hammond advised that the transportation aid comes to the SU and the transportation expense is the net of the expenses and the aid. She noted that in the draft without the transportation she put the aid directly in the budget.

Ms. Hollebeek questioned the school to work liaison position. Ms. Hammond advised that this person works with high school students. Ms. Hammond advised that the budget bottom line is down 1.25%. There was discussion about the operation of plant being 3.0 fte. There is 1 supervisor and 1 custodian in each building. There was discussion about the increase in the liability insurance. Ms. Hammond advised that there may be some savings there with the closing and sale of BRHS.

Ms. Tarbell noted that she had asked for a listing of positions and fte and wondered if it had been completed yet. Ms. Trimboli advised that the budgeting has been too busy. Ms. Tarbell requested that it be available by February. Mr. Venter questioned the equalized pupils. Ms. Hammond advised that it is 354.1. The cost per pupil is 18,755.72 per equalized pupils. The penalty threshold has already been set. The yield (which impacts the tax rate) may still change.

Ms. Hammond reported that the excess costs and any bond will come off from the yield projected. There was discussion about the tuition rate for GM. Ms. Hammond advised that MR is \$15,500 and GM is \$17,000. BRIS will be the public high school state average. She advised that for the GM rate, she had missed some off-setting revenues when quickly planning the announced tuition, but when actually doing the calculation found it closer to \$17,000 and this is what the GM board approved for MS/HS students. This is the figure that Ms. Hammond used to plan the tuition rates.

Mr. Venter questioned how the students will be fed. Ms. Hammond advised that the schools will be operating their own food service program. Ms. Hollebeek questioned the removal of the \$80,000 renovations for the food service. At this point the LES students will still eat and have food prepared at the community center.

Ms. Alberty **moved** to approve the 2020-2021 budget as presented at \$7,288,496. Ms. Tarbell seconded. The motion carried unanimously.

The board thanked Ms. Powden, Ms. Hammond and the administration for their work on this budget. Ms. Trimboli also thanked the Town of Ludlow for working with them to ease into the change.

Ms. Hammond advised that she went through the merger study report to see why they aren't seeing the savings they had planned. The board requested that she share that information and then talk about it at the next meeting. She noted that Mr. French took the general state support grant (\$6 million) and estimated 131 students tuitioned, averaging \$16,000 per student. He also included special education for the HS students (but that is in the SU budget) and also took the Ludlow's budget less the 40% for the transportation. The administration was taken out twice since it was already removed pre-merger. She advised that this merger information was based on if they did the merger in FY15. She re-calculated each of the items based on FY19, FY20 and FY21 information. For example, the GSSG was \$1 million more than originally estimated. The prediction didn't take into account cost of living increases. She noted that the difference between the GSSG and the budget has gone down over the last 3 years, from \$1.01million to \$658,000. She noted that using some calculations, the actual savings is about \$392,000, but taking into account some of the unanticipated changes, this is somewhat less. She also noted that the health insurance costs have increased 24.7% over 2 years.

Ms. Tarbell advised that the people in Middlebury are questioning the legality of the mergers. Mr. Venter noted that the supreme court is seeing the small schools' group and hearing their arguments. Mr. Hutt Vater noted that this is the group that tried to defeat the law before it passed.

B. Public Comment

Mr. Buckley advised that he has put in for the remainder of the 2-year term that Ms. McGuire was appointed for. He suggested that she run for one of the remaining terms. She has done that and circulated a petition among the board. The board discussed the various members' terms, and how the outgoing board members transition out and the newly elected board members transition in and reorganize.

C. Annual Warning

Mr. Orzechowski read aloud the annual warning. Mr. Buckley **moved** to approve the annual warning as read. Ms. Tarbell noted that last year they had discussed alternating towns each year and last year it was messed up. She wanted to confirm that the location in the warning was correct. Ms. Hammond advised that there would be televisions in the other town. There was discussion about the informational meeting location. Ms. Tarbell seconded. The motion carried unanimously.

The board discussed the warning for the annual school district meeting. Mr. Johnson noted that the informational meeting must be before the Australian ballot. The reorganization of the board does not happen at the annual meeting. The board discussed that the heading of the Annual meeting needs to also say Informational Meeting. This will be 2 separate meetings that run back to back. There will be an informational meeting about the budget and then the annual meeting.

Ms. Powden advised that the informational meeting will be separately warned. Ms. Tarbell **moved** to approve the annual school district meeting warning—the meeting will be held at Ludlow Elementary School in Presidential Hall (gymnasium) on Tuesday February 25, 2020 at 6:30 p.m. Mr. Buckley seconded and the motion carried unanimously.

Ms. Powden advised that last year the informational meeting was part of the annual meeting warning. She suggested that if the board wants the two together, they should re-approve the warning to include the informational hearing at 6:00 p.m. before the annual meeting. The informational meeting will be held at 6:45 p.m. Ms. Powden suggested that sometimes there is an article that the public may need more information about before approving so they may want to do the informational meeting before the annual meeting. Mr. Orzechowski advised that there isn't such an article. Ms. Tarbell **moved** to hold the informational meeting at LES in Presidential Hall Gym on February 25, 2020 at 6:45 p.m. and warn it as such. Mr. Buckley seconded and the motion carried unanimously.

There was discussion about the transportation and the bussing being retrofit to be a school bus since the school will be employing the driver. This will allow the school district to get transportation aid reimbursement for the bus driver salary.

VI. NEXT MEETING DATE AND AGENDA:

The next regular meeting will be on February 12, 2020 at LES at 6:00 p.m.

VII. EXECUTIVE SESSION:

A. Title I, Section 313(a)(1)(B) Labor Relations Agreements with Employees

Ms. Faenza **moved** to find that premature general public knowledge regarding teacher and support staff negotiations would place the board at a substantial disadvantage because it would put the board at risk for disclosing its negotiation strategies if discussed in public. Mr. Buckley seconded. Ms. Powden advised that Mr. Leopold has asked that they speak with the districts about the status of the negotiations. The motion carried unanimously.

Ms. Faenza **moved** to enter executive session at 7:02 p.m. for the purpose of discussing teacher and support staff negotiations under the provisions of Title 1, Section 313(a)(1)(B) of Vermont Statutes (labor relations agreements with employees), inviting Mr. Hutt Vater, Ms. Trimboli, Ms. Hammond and Ms. Powden. Ms. Alberty seconded. The motion carried unanimously.

The board returned from executive session at 7:10 p.m. No action taken.

VIII. ADJOURNMENT:

Ms. Alberty **moved** to adjourn at 7:11 p.m. Ms. Hollebeek seconded and the motion carried unanimously.

Respectfully submitted,

Amber Wilson
Board Recording Secretary