

ConVal’s budget-building process

By JIM FREDRICKSON
During the next eight weeks, there’s going to be a lot of activity as the various school boards in the area complete the process associated with getting voter approval for the 2020-21 school year budgets.

The ConVal School District Administration began the process to develop our next budget last summer. The proposed budget was approved by the School Board on Jan. 7. The Deliberative Session Part I is scheduled for 6 p.m. on Feb. 4 at the ConVal High School gym. Part II (voting) will be conducted on March 10 in the respective town halls.

The proposed gross budget is \$50,565,103 – a 1.87 percent increase over the current school year. The school board website contains a lot of information and more will be uploaded shortly, including the 2nd Edition of our “School Budget Primer” (<https://schoolboard.convalsd.net>).

The ongoing challenges associated with minimizing increases in our operating budget and providing a quality education show no signs of abating. These include, but are not

limited to, unfunded federal and state mandates, inadequate state funding for education, aging infrastructure, and well deserved increases in staff salaries and benefits.

Hopefully, the NH state commission looking at education funding that recently started work will come up with some equitable and innovative options to reduce the burden on property taxes.

These challenges are in addition to our slow but steady decline in enrollment – which raises the following perennial questions: why isn’t the budget going down instead of up? How long can the district maintain our current “one high school, two middle schools, and eight elementary schools” model? When is “small too small?” The answers are not easy and are beyond the scope of this article, but the questions remain valid and will continue to be discussed for the foreseeable future. No decisions have been made and none are imminent. We’re simply doing our jobs by looking at alternatives in the event we reach the point where we’ll need to bring a proposal to the voters.



The ConVal School Board is working through the process to present a budget that will gain approval during the district vote in March.

Of more immediate concern is the need to address our aging infrastructure. We’re working on a long-range plan that will likely include a proposed infrastructure bond for voter consideration next year and, hopefully, subsequent partial compensation through NH state “Building Aid” for which we recently submitted our application.

The 2020-21 Capital Improvement Plan includes

LEDGER-TRANSCRIPT FILE PHOTO

appropriations (the \$540,000 “paving” Warrant Article that will be on the ballot in March).

The proposed budget also includes an expansion of our current pre-K program at three schools. This will allow additional 3 to 4 year olds to attend and will expand to an all day program for 4 year olds.

We’re also hoping to propose a new long-term solar power project for installation on the high school property. While the savings expected to be achieved won’t solve the larger district issues mentioned above, voter approval of this project will allow the broader ConVal community to demonstrate our commitment to the broader global challenge associated with climate change.

The Board and Administration will continue to work to deliver a quality education at reasonable cost. We encourage your participation in both the discussions at the Deliberative Session Part I and in voting on March 10.

Jim Fredrickson is Chairman of the ConVal School Board’s Budget & Property Committee

Resilience for all



MARGARET NELSON
VIEW FROM THE RIVER

I saw a man wearing shorts the other day. And the next day I put on my winter coat, hat, gloves, scarf, and boots. Both of us were appropriately dressed for the day – one day it was in the 60’s and the next it was in the 20’s and 30’s. Some of us have developed what I will call weather resiliency, the ability to roll with it, to readjust our wardrobe, to do whatever we need to do to live peacefully with whatever the day’s weather brings.

So I got to thinking about this. At The River Center our work with families addresses resiliency. The dictionary tells me that resiliency means rebounding or springing back; the ability to recover quickly. A strong family is able to bounce back from adversity.

Don’t we all want the ability to bounce back? Stuff happens, as we all know or learn quickly. We dream dreams and make our plans. Rarely do we experience a smooth

journey to our dreams. Life intervenes and gets in our way. We get sick, we lose a job, our happily ever after ends in divorce.

How do we build resilience in our families? Dr. Froma Walsh says, “with the magic of the small, everyday things. A conversation here, an activity there. Word by word, bond after bond, families fill their wells with strength and wisdom, hope and creativity.”

If this is true, we can all do this. This is not an expensive Resiliency Plan. We all have access to building supportive relationships. Developing a sense of team within the family, the attitude that everyone is important, everyone is needed. Together we can get through this crisis. We will work together to reduce our grocery bill. We will all fill the wood box. We can all encourage the parent who is looking for a job.

Looking to family members as examples can also help us. I think of my grandfather who owned a saw mill in rural Maine. He was resilient and resourceful. He kept a cow for milk, chickens for eggs, and bees for honey. He raised a resilient family that lived through the depression years and thrived. Not by becoming rich, oh no. But they were healthy, hard-working, and happy.

Resilient families support each other through thick and

thin. They celebrate together when celebrations are in order, they comfort each other when comfort is needed. They acknowledge the hard times and resolve to make the best of it, to figure it out together. Resilience doesn’t give up. It presses forward with hope that we will get through this.

Stuff happens. Life gets messy. Families don’t always have the resiliency they need to deal successfully with adversity. The River Center parenting support programs are here to help support, encourage and strengthen families.

My husband’s response to the warm/cold weather swing was to bring out the ice skates. He is hoping that the lakes will freeze nice and smooth for perfect skating. And if that doesn’t happen, the snowshoes are ready. And so are the sneakers. We are ready for whatever.

Let The River Center help you be more resilient by building up that rainy day fund for your family. Our free tax program is targeted at households with incomes of up to \$66,000. The certified volunteer tax preparers will help you get all the tax benefits you are qualified to receive. For more information, give us a call at 924-6800 or taxes@rivercenter.us.

Margaret E. Nelson is executive director of the River Center in Peterborough

The growing divide



HOPE PETTEGREW
FINDING A HOME

My reason for writing these monthly articles is to educate the public about homelessness in our area. It is not common to see people without shelter on the streets in a rural area such as ours, so many citizens do not realize we have a problem here. Some of the people who are homeless “couch surf” with family and friends; some live in their cars; some even live in tents in the woods. The latter seems unimaginable during the winter months but it is a fact.

The Monadnock Area Transitional Shelter in Peterborough serves people who are homeless. These families or single folks may come from any of the ConVal School District towns as well as from beyond Temple Mountain to the east, Hillsborough to the north, from towns on our border with Massachusetts and Keene

and beyond.

Being a transitional shelter, we receive no state or federal monies. This allows people to stay at the shelter longer in order to benefit from our program which assists them getting back on their feet.

Since the US Census Bureau started tracking people 50 years ago, the gap between the haves and the have-nots in the United States has grown, especially in nine states last year – including New Hampshire – according to an article in the Washington Post by Taylor Telford.

The biggest reason is that the minimum wage stagnated at \$7.25 per hour for more than a decade; yet even with a new higher minimum wage, it hasn’t closed the gap. The median household income is now \$63,000 annually, but when you factor in inflation, it is roughly the same as 20 years ago. And many people go without health insurance making that a critical issue should a health need arise, often depleting any nest egg a family might have saved.

According to the GINI Index (go online to learn more about this) measures the wealth distribution across the population of an area or country. Zero indicates equality whereas one means total inequality.

In 1967, the GINI Index for the United States was .397; in 2018, the index was .485. In Europe, there was no nation with an index reading of more than .38 in 2018.

The need for “mixed” housing grows. I would like to suggest that local landlords who have a building with multiple units consider offering one or two (depending on the size of the building) apartments at a lower rate. This has worked in other states with no ill effects and has proven to be a better scenario for people of different economic levels living side-by-side.

Please share information from this article with your friends, family and neighbors. Also, please visit our website: www.matsnh.org for more information about MATS.

WISH LIST: A reliable car; gift cards from local stores and gas stations for our MATS guests to use; feminine products; sturdy bunk beds. Please call the MATS office if you wish to donate any items and leave a message for Susan Howard, our Program Manager, at 924-5033. You may also mail some items to MATS, P.O. Box 3053 in Peterborough. Thank you very much and Happy New Year!

Hope Pettegrew is a long-time MATS volunteer.

Bridge construction means unavoidable changes

On Wednesday, Jan. 22, the Main Street Bridge in Peterborough will be reduced to one inbound lane from Route 202 and Concord Street.

This partial closure was initiated in response to recent inspection reports showing extreme deterioration to the structure of the bridge, rendering it unsafe for full use. For those who may not know, the bridge has been red-listed for more than 20 years – yes, you read that right. Over time,

the weight restriction on the bridge has been lowered to where it currently allows vehicles not to exceed three tons. That’s basically the weight of your passenger vehicle. To say that the situation is dire is an understatement.

The good news is that on Jan. 15, Town Meeting voted to bond the additional funds needed to move forward on the Main Street Bridge replacement project, which we expect will begin within the next 60 to 90 days. Between

now and then, the bridge will allow traffic one-way into town. Drivers will need to use other routes to exit downtown Peterborough. Once the project is fully underway, the bridge will be closed to vehicular traffic. Walkers and cyclists will have access to a new pedestrian bridge for crossing during the construction, which is scheduled to complete on or about October 2021.

We know this project will be an inconvenience for those

who regularly use the bridge and for the downtown businesses who depend on them. Traffic will be rerouted from Route 202 to downtown via Grove Street, Summer Street, and Elm Street. Extensive signage will clearly help travelers make their way downtown by alternate routes. A banner will be displayed at the entrance to Grove Street at the Routes 101/202 intersection directing folks downtown.

We trust that those of us

who regularly frequent local merchants will continue to do so, and that those who come for day trips won’t turn around and go home because there’s one less way into town.

The Select Board and town staff plan to do everything possible to support our downtown businesses during this project. We want all of our beloved shops, restaurants and businesses to be there when the bridge reopens. Many shop owners have ex-

pressed concern that this project will put them out of business.

We can’t let that happen. If we all continue to shop, bank, dine, and be entertained as usual, then it won’t.

Let us all come together to help bridge the challenges ahead.

*The Peterborough Select Board
Tyler Ward, Chair
Karen Hatcher
Bill Taylor*



Want to know what events are happening?

Community Calendar every Tuesday
Arts & Leisure every Thursday