

A look at ConVal’s 2020-21 budget season

Janine Lesser
For the Ledger-Transcript

Springtime brings new life back to us here in the Northeast – and time to vote on a new school budget. On March 10, voters in the nine communities of the ConVal School District will vote on the warrant that dictates the school district budget. As we prepare to think about this annual decision, it’s always important to consider what’s at stake.

The nine communities are justly proud of the education that they have been able to provide for families who live in the ConVal District. The administration and school board work hard to look to the future and ensure we are preparing our students to work and thrive, and keep New Hampshire growing and healthy – a state where the children we are educating will be proud to live and raise their own families.

What does it take to ensure these opportunities continue? A good and fair budget, for one, that carefully manages resources raised by taxation against the diverse needs of the nine towns; and most importantly, a belief that we are making an investment in our communities, our families, our children, together. It is not an easy decision for many of us, as it can involve some considerable sacrifice when it

comes to the tax bill.

The administration and school board regularly struggle with the complexity of running the district. We want to make sure that your questions are answered. The Budget and Property Committee developed a comprehensive explanation of how the budget is developed, how the budget translates to your tax bill. “A School Budget Primer: Understanding School Budget Preparation, Methodology and the Impact on Property Taxes” was distributed at the first Deliberative Session on Feb. 4. The primer also reviews the 2020-21 warrant articles and explains the school board’s position on those articles and can be found on the ConVal website within the Budget Digest Resource page. You can also click the banner at the top of the ConVal School District website which directs you to the budget information.

If you have questions that aren’t answered on the website, please contact your school board representative, whose contact information is available at the website as well. We hope that you will vote “yes” on the operating budget, and the recommended articles.

You will also receive a flyer in the mail that explains the warrant and its articles, and directs you to the ConVal website for budget information. It



is our intention to be as transparent as possible, and provide the information that will help you understand the district operations. You can find all ConVal School District budget information here: <https://schoolboard.convalsd.net/budget-2020-digest/>.

Default budgets are implemented when the proposed operating budget fails to win voter approval. Before you vote, here are some facts to consider about the ConVal budget:

■ For the past eight years, ConVal administration and Board has held the operating budget to 1% annual increases, sometimes less than .5%. This was due to a variety of cost savings measures: changing health insurance plans, cost sharing the health insurance with district staff, postponing capital improvements (high school parking lot!!!), using trust funds to

cover what would normally appear in the budget, staff decreases, redistributing staff responsibilities. Last year was the exception, when a combination of reduced state funding and increased mandatory expenditures increased the operating budget by 1.8%. This year is another increase: 2.23%. This increase in the 2020-21 operating budget is due primarily to the need for long-deferred capital improvements and the second year of the teacher contract – which we support and believe to be necessary and fair.

■ At the same time the administration and Board managed to keep the operating budget increase to a minimum in past years, the budget met its contractual obligations, including transportation, new teacher contracts; continued to ensure student safety and excellence in edu-

cation the taxpayers count on by implementing security measures, continuing with curriculum review, professional development and implementation, implementation of ever-growing state and federal statutory requirements, and finally, ever-decreasing local state education investment. The state has recently convened an education funding task force, partly due to the will of our legislature, and partly due to several school districts’ lawsuit (one of whom is ConVal). The past year was a single year of some funding relief, which in the ConVal district went back to the nine communities. This should be reflected in your tax bill.

■ When you see the difference between the operating budget and the increase in your education property tax – it is primarily due to decreased enrollment due to our local demographics, and the shrinking state funds. What the state chooses not to pay, the local taxpayer must make up. Please consider the budget cutting that has gone on for the last five years in the interest of keeping your property tax increase to a minimum – and understand the current increases in that light: there are now no more places to cut. The 2.23 % increase in the operating budget reflects the Board and the administration’s effort to keep

the district moving forward towards its goals of excellence for every child, and fiscal responsibility.

If the budget fails, we must implement a default budget. When it comes to the default budget, the biggest problem is the lack of places to go to cut. Everything that could be cut, that would not significantly affect the education our district children receive, has been cut in previous years. (This is now the new normal.) The default budget will require \$1,422,487 in cuts to the 2020-21 budget.

In anticipation of this possible event, the Board requested the administration develop a list of possible cuts. The administration offered this list in a series of five tiers: the first tier being the farthest from student impact on education, to the closest and most impactful in tier five. The reality is that in order to meet the \$1.5 million in cuts, we will have to go deep into tier four, and even some cuts from tier five.

If the default budget must go into place, the Board will work with the administration to identify the list of items selected for cuts from the 2020-21 budget, and these will be eliminated before the year begins. We hope you will vote to support the school budget.

Janine Lesser is a member of the school district’s Communication Committee.

What two owls taught me as a child



MARGARET NELSON
VIEW FROM THE RIVER

When I was eight years old my parents started giving me an allowance. I believe I received twenty-five cents a week. I saved up my money. My very first purchase was a piggy bank – only it wasn’t a pig. It was two owls sitting on a branch that said, “Be Wise Save.”

All through my growing up years those wise owls looked at me from my bedroom shelf, reminding me to keep saving

my dollars and cents.

Saving money is a life skill. It requires some thought, some intentionality. It is so easy to let those dollars sift out of your hands.

My parents set each of us up with our own savings accounts. Through school, you could save a dime a week in a special little dime saver.

During my babysitting career, those wise owls reminded me to Be Wise Save. Putting some money aside for future wants and needs was important – and continues to be important for all of us.

Linda talks about saving for a purse she really wanted. She did it by saving her lunch money and going without lunch. Maybe not the best method, but she did get that purse that she fondly remembers.

Susan, as a single mom, saved to take the kids out to dinner or for a special birth-

day outing to Canobie Lake. I have saved for a dishwasher, vacations, skis, a camera, a car, education, weddings. Savings can be for retirement, a house, or for whatever may come our way.

To coin a phrase, saving money makes good cents. (That was good, wasn’t it???)

Tax season is here at The River Center. As well as preparing tax returns for free, we encourage taxpayers to save some of their refund. To create or add to a fund for those emergencies that arise, like fixing the car or a leaky roof. Having some money in the bank can lower our stress levels as we look into the future. It can even be fun as we see our savings grow and our goals become reality. It was a happy day when I brought home that dishwasher, let me tell you!

Tax season is about more than just getting your tax re-

turn filed. It is an opportunity to set aside some of your return into savings. Saving for something you want or something you need, you decide.

The River Center phone is ringing off the hook to schedule tax appointments. The volunteer greeters and IRS certified preparers have been meeting since the fall getting ready. Individuals with under \$66,000 household income are welcome to call and set up an appointment. You can also take advantage of the Do It Yourself tax return, using our computers and having a certified tax preparer nearby to answer any questions you may have during the process. Give us a call at 924-6800 ext. 11 to find out more.

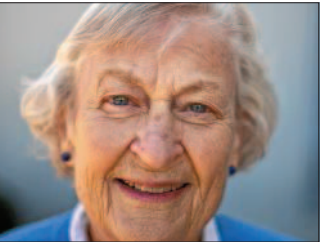
And remember, Be Wise Save.

Margaret Nelson is the executive director of the River Center.ii



PHOTO BY MARGARET NELSON
These two owls taught a young Margaret Nelson to save her money.

Big thanks to the community



HOPE PETTEGREW
FINDING A HOME

The people involved with the Monadnock Area Transitional Shelter in Peterborough would like to thank the many donors of items for our guests last year. Many individuals and families gave gift cards to local stores for clothing, food, gas, and other necessities. Some also gave gifts of items mentioned on our Wish List. MATS also received a wonderful donation from the New Hampshire Charitable Foundation’s Henry L and Patricia J. Nielsen Fund. Thank you!

Our guests were able to enjoy a beautiful Christmas because of everyone’s generosity. At Thanksgiving, the Divine Mercy Church donated dinners to our families again last year which was greatly appreciated.

MATS assisted many people in 2019: we gave a safe

and warm home to eight families – nine adults and 17 children for a total of 26 people. Of the children, six were under six-years old; 10 were between six and twelve; and there was one child over 13. Our guests came from Peterborough, Greenfield, Wilton, Antrim and Gilford, New Hampshire.

Our annual Candlelight Vigil held on the Winter Solstice in late December was attended by just under 40 people this year. And many of those people went on to the United Methodist Church on Concord Street to enjoy a delicious soup supper free of charge. The Vigil is always an inspiring service, remembering people who were homeless throughout New Hampshire, and had died last year. What makes it so special is hearing about the individuals and what they had loved to do in life.

Last year, MATS sponsored several fundraisers: a BBQ in Greenfield to raise money for our Stephen Fund (funds are used for children at the shelter to participate in local activities that require a fee); a Trivia Game Night; a “Buy-a-Light” to decorate an outdoor pine tree at the Monadnock Community Hospital.

When our Project Man-

ager, Susan Howard, was at The River Center last year for her weekly office hours there, she experienced 130 contacts with 45 people assisting them to follow through with the appropriate resource. She also helped them with housing applications and finding community agencies; more often than not her guidance helped them avoid homelessness.

We hope that you will notice the donation jars that MATS puts in many local stores. To name a few stores that have them, please look in Steele’s, Roy’s Market, the Hancock Market and the Harvest Market in Greenfield. We are very grateful for these donations and thank all who share their change.

WISH LIST: A reliable car; gift cards for gas and to local stores for the many items people need and cannot buy with food stamps (such as feminine products). MATS is listed in the business section of the phone book under Monadnock Area Transitional Shelter, or call Susan at 924-5033 and leave a message about how to pass them on to MATS. Or visit our web site: www.matsnh.org. Thank you.

Hope Pettegrew is a long-time MATS volunteer.

Immigration answers absent from presidential race

By ALEJANDRO URRUTIA
Under the Same Stars

Where are our leaders when it is time to defend the rights of the most vulnerable?

Every day, white supremacists are working in the White House, creating a national emergency for migrant families, and we all know the consequences: thousands of immigrant parents and children are in detention, separated or blocked – in grave danger – on the other side of the border.

Families are coming here because their governments are not only failing to protect them, but many times the authorities are the abusers. Children suffer the consequences of the trauma for the rest of their lives.

Instead of giving them a hearing and the opportunity of living in security in the land of freedom, democracy and justice, we send the families back to horror.

Everybody who steps on the soil of the United States has rights, but immigration officers, functionaries of the United States government, violate not only the civil rights of legal asylum seekers but their human rights.

Some have lost their lives.

It doesn’t matter what the asylum laws say; the only voices the president hears are voices of his white supremacist advisers and the anti-immigrant rage that has defied laws, decades of asylum tradition, long-standing foreign relations, constitutional doctrines and the voice of Congress itself.

Yet, there is a timid response from elected officials who agree these policies are wrong.

They are concerned that taking a strong stand about immigration could jeopardize their re-election due to the active, orchestrated campaign to misinform the voters.

The Democratic presidential contenders in the debates are launching proposals around everything from global warming to the student loan burden, but rarely do they offer recommendations on how to solve what is happening at the southern border or reforming immigration laws.

During the Democratic debate in Iowa, immigration was absent, giving the issue to the Trump administration – a president who is already putting in place reforms

based on immigrant skills, nationalities, race and allowing fewer people. The administration is disregarding the humanitarian crisis created by its policies and the inaction of past administrations.

The Democratic presidential candidates criticize Trump’s policies on immigration and how he demonizes immigration, but immigration reform is not one of their key issues of the campaign. They are not talking about the urgent need of thousands of families separated by the arbitrary actions of the Immigration and Customs Enforcement Agency.

I am not hopeful that I will see our broken immigration system fixed. That is, unless we the voters make our elected officials accountable on election day and every day. Vote, call, write and speak up. Keep doing what you do to protect the most vulnerable people.

Alejandro Urrutia of Hudson emigrated from Mexico with his family. He serves on the New Hampshire Advisory Board to the Federal Civil Rights Commission and the Granite State Organizing Project.