

OFFICE OF THE SUPERINTENDENT OF SCHOOLS

106 Hancock Road
Peterborough, New Hampshire

CONTOOCOOK VALLEY SCHOOL BOARD

Selectmen's Advisory Committee

Thursday, January 28, 2021
7:00 p.m.

Physical Location: None

Virtual Location:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/86723185241?pwd=UWxEMHJlVWVseHhwQmFsOCtqaDNYQT09>

Passcode: sE2GRn

Telephone: 1 301 715 8592

ID: 867 2318 5241

Passcode: 266850

Minutes

Present: John Robertson, Jeff Brown, Ken Caisse, Diane Callahan, Kate Fuller, Ed Juengst, Henry Kunhardt, Kristie LaPlante, Bob Marshall, Carole Monroe, Tim Theberge, Alan Edelkind, Katherine Heck, Janine Lesser, Stephen Ullman, Dr. Kimberly Saunders, Jim Creighton

1. Call Meeting to Order

John Robertson called the meeting to order at 7:02 p.m.

2. Accept Minutes of October 22, 2020

Ed Juengst moved to accept the minutes of October 22, 2020. Diane Callahan second. Unanimous.

3. School Program - Where are we going?

Dr. Kimberly Saunders said that the main goal is to work toward making sure we are all back in school. K-8 is successfully in school five days a week. An every other week program is in place at the high school, alternating cohorts (blue cohort in person one week with gold live remote and then switching the following week). We have been fortunate with only three occasions in the schools that involved adults with positive COVID rates. The closings were a result of the number of staff being exposed resulting in not having enough staff remaining to supervise children. Our most recent was at Frankestown Elementary School. Board members and community members stepped up to substitute so that the school could reopen to allow staff to quarantine.

Numbers decrease locally and in our region. We track the numbers in each of the nine towns. State numbers are going down as well. We continue to be one of the only school systems consistently in schools in person. We are one of the few where our K-8 students are in school every day. We have one more remote segment scheduled which will be reassessed to determine the need. The COVID

Monitoring Team meets every weekday at 8:00 a.m. to review data and to determine phases. We are currently in the green phase. Learning loss from the extended amount of time is real. We continue to move forward. We did not lose half as many students as other districts did. We registered the largest kindergarten class in a decade for ConVal.

Anticipated challenges include retirement cost increases of near \$1M. This is on top of all of the COVID related costs to purchase PPE, staying open, and reestablishing learning milestones for students.

Ed Juengst shared his amazement with the so few number of positive cases for the school and region. Tim Theberge spoke about the mandate to mask up, outdoor learning, and other mitigations including upgrades to HVAC systems having made a positive impact.

Kimberly Saunders said that we had an aggressive plan to get back in school. We prioritized safety first, but we made it clear that in-person learning for as many students as possible was a priority. The morning meeting with the COVID Monitoring Team is made up of an infectious specialist, multiple doctors, facilities director, athletic director, and nurses, among others that talk about the impact and the district and make recommendations.

Jim Creighton, State Representative, said that the broadband issue has been an issue and he wondered if it still is for ConVal.

Tim Theberge spoke about the efforts underway in several towns to expand broadband coverage; Dublin and Greenfield are underway. It is about the last mile for many of our towns. It is an issue. None of the federal programs meet the "Last Mile" or flip flop.

They envision building a public/private partnership. It is almost like a co-op type set-up. For a town like Hancock that needs \$1M+ to finish the project to build out the rest of the network, not including fiber, it is a challenge. The District has provided cellular based hotspots to families who need them at a significant cost. It is still not ideal because of poor cellular coverage. There is \$300M that will fall under the FCC that is new money that might be available from the State. Tim Theberge said that he has made connections encouraging that some of these funds be allocated to "Last Mile" because no other funding is available for this.

Stephen Ullman spoke about the potential for young people to lose up to one year of learning as a result of COVID.

Kimberly Saunders spoke about the loss of one year of progress across all students.

Diane Callahan, Sharon, said that several people in town with children had hotspots that did not work. She asked what we do for those children.

Kimberly Saunders said that we have created a tiered system when we are remote that places students in a category that allows them to come into schools for in-person learning.

Ed Juengst said that Peterborough does have RFP's out to several vendors to extend the area that we cover. None have been returned yet.

Tim Theberge said that the challenge with Comcast is that they aren't willing to add a new connection fee, which is what Consolidated is doing. The fee is what pays the bond. Comcast does not see the user fee as part of their business model in Hancock.

Carole Monroe, Dublin, asked if CCI did not respond to the RFP's. Tim Theberge said that they did not respond to the RFP in Hancock.

Carole said that CCI has received an influx of cash from an outside investor. It might be a good time to reach back out to CCI.

4. ConVal Warrant

Kimberly Saunders said that the proposed operating budget is \$52,583,177 with a default of \$51,065,984. We also have a Collective Bargaining Agreement. There is an article that asks if the collective bargaining agreement is defeated that a special meeting take place. Several trust funds are requested to be replenished should there be a fund balance at the end of the school year. There is \$500K proposed for the Building Capital Reserve, split into two separate articles to allow other trusts to be replenished first.

There is an article asking for the ability to retain a fund balance. Towns are able to retain a specific amount for a fund balance. A recent change in law permits school districts to do the same. Schools could retain up to 5%. Had we had a fund balance in the current year, we would have been less dependent on the CAREs Act to provide funding. This fund balance retention would have allowed us to continue traditional programming and the ability not to have to freeze the budget and cut programming to avoid a deficit. The estimated total cost of COVID was over \$3.1M. The board has pretty strict parameters for this as well.

Tim Theberge said that there would be the expectation that the board would have specific policies around that fund balance. It will be no more than 2.5%. We will be transparent about the use of these funds for emergency circumstances. It is not additional trust funds. Prior to expending any funds, the School Board will hold a public hearing on that action. Our upper limit will be 2.5% for emergency use only with a public hearing requirement.

Katherine Heck said that NH Legislation amended up to 5% of net assessment may be retained with the requirement to hold a public hearing and does not require DRA certification to spend the funds. In order to assure the public that when self-governing, a public hearing would take place.

The law in NH is catching up for school districts.

Carole Monroe asked if we know what it would have been in terms of dollars for last year. Katherine said that it would have been just over \$900K.

State Representative, Jim Creighton, asked if there is a perspective on what that does to property taxes.

Katherine Heck said that the retained fund balance would have already been taxed. These are funds that would offset taxes in the future on monies that would not have to be raised. We wouldn't be able to give as much back to taxpayers.

Representative Creighton asked the impact on the proposed budget. Dr. Saunders said that the first opportunity to do this would not be until 2022/2023. We have to end the fiscal year we are on before we can retain.

A 4.5% increase over last year is the impact on the proposed budget.

Kimberly Saunders said that the average over the last five years has been approximately 1% each year. A decrease in revenue from the State impacts the tax rate.

Carole Monroe asked if there is a maximum over time that would be retained.

Katherine said that we would self-govern and cannot exceed or carry over from year to year.

Henry Kunhardt said that \$800K remained at the end of FY'20 that applied to the following year and then \$600K was spent on COVID.

Kimberly said that we had to spend dollars related to COVID.

Henry Kunhardt said that Frankestown works hard to keep local tax rates level. The school tax went up 12% or 13% which caught the attention of taxpayers. He said that it appears similar next year. He said that he hears that there is losing support for the district.

Kimberly Saunders said that a 4% increase in a year that near \$1M is due to retirement is a factor. The only way to decrease retirement is to eliminate positions. The only way to eliminate positions is to close schools. We need to do that or slowly chip away at programming.

Henry further said that the Frankestown school portion went up near 14% and is anticipated to be the same. He said that giving the school the authority to retain and not return funds causes the towns to raise that money again in the next budget.

Tim Theberge said that there is near \$20M of work needed in the Capital Plan on our structures. We are funding the reserves from anything remaining at the end of the year. The costs for facilities would have to be raised; likely through a bond. Investments for the long-term needs is crucial. These are conversations that need to happen.

Stephen Ullman said that the State has downshifted costs to districts over the years.

Kimberly Saunders said that it also has to do with the fact that Frankestown has fewer students resulting in less adequacy to the town.

Carole Monroe said that when we look at all of the articles, she calculated an increase of near \$3M. She said that is quite a number to be increasing. She shared her concern about the total amount.

Carole further said that towns have an opportunity to decide when they are going to vote. She asked what towns have decided.

Kimberly Saunders said that appropriations to the trust funds are not new monies, they come from the fund balance at the end of the year. She shared an example where a boiler and an oil tank left us.

Ed Juengst said that the problem is that we have too many schools. It sounds like some of the towns that previously opposed closing schools may have to compromise.

John Robertson said that it is due time that the State step up and raise the funds that have been reduced for funding education.

Kimberly Saunders said that she would be happy to go over House Bill 20 at the next SAC meeting and the impact that it would have financially on the District and therefore our nine towns. It would be the most aggressive voucher program in the country. The public dollars could be spent on any school in the state as well as outside of NH.

Katherine Heck said that fund balance could not be retained until 2022/2023. We are also working on a Capital Plan. We have only been able to fund our reserves through remaining funds. If we aren't going to have a fund balance to maintain our facilities, we still have to turn the dial and this is a financial tool we can use. Salaries are 85% of the school district budget.

5. COVID-19 Update

Discussed earlier in the agenda.

6. Other

None.

Stephen Ullman moved to adjourn at 8:15 p.m. Ed Juengst second. Unanimous.

Respectfully submitted,

Brenda Marschok