

Our mission is to provide rigorous and varied educational opportunities that challenge and engage all students to attain their highest level of intellectual, social, physical, and emotional growth. (2007)



LITCHFIELD SCHOOL BOARD

Litchfield, New Hampshire 03052

B. Bourque, Chair

C. Harrison, Vice Chair

Draft Minutes of the Special District Meeting

held on September 16, 2020

State of New Hampshire

Time, Place: 6:00 p.m. in the Campbell High School Gymnasium

Present: Moderator, Mr. Frank Byron, presiding.

School Board members: Mr. Brian Bourque, Chair; Mrs. Christine Harrison, Vice Chair; Mrs. Elizabeth MacDonald, Mr. Robert G. Meyers, Mrs. Tara Hershberger.

Dr. Michael Jette, Superintendent of Schools; Mr. Cory Izbicki, Business Administrator; Mrs. Michele Flynn, Administrative Assistant; Attorney Diane Gorrow.

Ballot clerks: Mrs. Nancy Pinciario, Mrs. Laura Gandia

Mr. Byron called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m.

Mr. Byron invited members to join him in the Pledge of Allegiance.

Mr. Byron invited Mr. Bourque, School Board Chair, to introduce the School Board and District staff.

Mr. Byron announced that Executive Orders due to COVID-19, masks are required to be worn in the building. A separate section is available for those in attendance and are unable or refuse to wear a mask.

Mr. Byron indicated that the special meeting is taking place according to RSA 197:3-a that allows a School District to respond to statutory changes in funding which have taken effect after the adoption of the School District's FY2021 budget and resulted in an increase in the distribution of funds for education to the Litchfield School District pursuant to RSA 198:41.

Mr. Byron read the Moderators Rules and made pertinent announcements.

As is customary, Mr. Byron asked voters if they were in favor of allowing non-voters and employees of the school district who were in attendance to comment during the meeting.

The majority was in favor of allowing non-voters and/or employees of the district to comment during this special meeting by voice vote.

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ARTICLE 1

Shall the Litchfield School District vote to raise and appropriate the sum of up to \$667,000 to the Capital Improvement Expendable Trust Fund previously established on March 10, 2020? This sum to be offset by a one-time grant of “fiscal disparity” funds in the amount of up to \$667,000 as part of the State of New Hampshire’s adequacy aid to the District. No amount to be raised by additional taxation. (Majority Vote Required)

Mr. Byron indicated that Dr. Jette, Superintendent of Schools, would speak to the article.

Dr. Jette explained that the current NH state budget allocates an additional \$62.5M in targeted appropriations to districts as “fiscal disparity aid”. The District has been allocated approximately \$667,000 of these funds. These one time funds are set to deploy in FY21. He noted these funds were not appropriated in March 2020 and voter approval is needed to transfer the funds to the Capital Improvement Expendable Trust Fund that was established and approved by the voters in March 2020. The School Board and School District consulted with the Budget Committee about the special meeting on August 27 in accordance and compliance with RSA 197:3a. The district has future projects that the funding will be used toward, such as Ventilation updates that total \$2.65M; GMS Planning \$320,000; LMS Kitchen \$300,000; CHS Gym Bleachers \$206,000. Current projects the district has either completed or are implementing include ventilation repairs (\$125,000); LMS canopy (\$220,000); GMS electrical repair (\$60,000). Because we are investing in the ventilation system, it is running better at CHS, but we still have a long way to go. We have contracted ventilation experts to assess the performance and condition of our ventilation systems in each school in the district and they have concluded after extensive evaluation and examination that the systems are beyond the end of their useful life. Electrical repairs at GMS were caused by a surge during a power outage that tripped the Standard D electrical box, which resulted in the failure of that circuit box.

Dr. Jette emphasized that this funding is critical to helping upgrade the repairs that need to be made going forward and have been identified in the District Capital Plan. He noted if the article does not pass, the one time revenue will go into the general fund and result in an unassigned fund balance, which will be used to offset the taxes. He noted that Litchfield State Representatives informed the public at the Annual Meeting in March 2020 that these were one time funds and that it was earmarked for infrastructure.

Dr. Jette further explained because of COVID 19 cost savings last year, the majority of the school district unassigned fund balance was returned to taxpayers and has offset taxes this year. He noted if this funding is returned to taxpayers it will result in an artificial dip that will cause a spike in the tax rate the following year. He reported that he and Mr. Izbicki sat in on multiple meetings regarding ventilation in the district, during which it was discovered the CHS system was never balanced in the past and valves are not functioning because of outdated controls.

Representative Ralph Boehm, 6 Gibson Drive, commented that he was glad to see the list of proposed items that need to be done to the school facilities. He indicated if we vote on this we have a list of things that are needed and we are voting on that list. He noted the way school funding works now is that the lower enrollment we have the higher the number of repairs that need to be paid for.

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Andrew Cutter, 6 Moose Hollow Road, commented that he is the Budget Committee Chairman and a member of the Capital Improvement Committee. He indicated next week a public hearing will be held on the Capital Plan. He pointed out that the list that was presented is a small subset of the needs of the school district. He expressed he is in favor of moving this money into the fund and believes it is fair to let people know what happens if the article is not approved. Mr. Cutter commented the money will go back into the general fund and will get returned to the Town and can be used for some of the items the Town needs and has identified.

Sue Ann Johnson, 35 Locke Mill Drive, asked if the Budget Committee has weighed in on what should be done with this money. She asked if they are in favor of a yes vote.

Mr. Cutter indicated the Budget Committee did receive the presentation, but no recommendation was requested because this is more of an advisory and was purely informational.

Mrs. Johnson asked who will decide how the money will be spent if we vote yes and can it be spent only on school infrastructure improvements and not on salaries or other things.

Dr. Jette explained because the money will be put in the trust fund it will be used for capital expenditures only and the School Board approves the expenditures.

Representative Rich Lascelles, 236 Charles Bancroft Highway, commented this money came from a State budget surplus at the end of next year. He explained the State decided to turn it back to towns and districts for capital improvement projects. He indicated that since we have had this pandemic crisis, we can assume revenues will be down in the State due to the COVID impact. He believes it is a good idea to put this money in the reserve fund with Budget Committee oversight so we don't have an artificial spike in taxes due to the decrease in revenues and more local level expenditures next year.

Rick Cayette, 19 Burgess, if this was so important and you gave examples, why did the Board put specifics on where the money can be allocated from to specific examples.

Richard Riley, 17 Moose Hollow Rd, commented that he heard stated tonight that there should be Budget Committee oversight with this money and heard that the School Board has oversight. He indicated he would like clarification on this. He commented that it was his understanding that these types of capital expenditures have to be approved by an individual vote as that is how it has historically been done. He asked why it is now you have a fund to expend money without an individual look at how this money would be spent. Mr. Riley commented you have a list, but a list is nothing more than a list and does not give you permission to spend the money that way, and that is my major concern.

Dr. Jette clarified that the Budget Committee does not have oversight on the Capital Plan and the School Board has the oversight over this fund. He commented there is a member of the Budget Committee on the Capital Improvement Committee and there is some oversight from various boards in the Town.

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Dr. Jette indicated the question was will the individual expenditures go to the voters for approval, and the answer is they will not. Currently, we are prioritizing health and safety needs like ventilation, and we have had to make a large investment in the ventilation alone. The School Board will have public discussions and meetings about capital expenditures and will take these items on a case by case basis. He noted the problem is we keep ignoring these issues to the point that it becomes a health and safety issue. He commented if you do something like bleacher replacement and all of a sudden there is a condemned sign on them and the Fire Department says we cannot occupy them and we have to repair them. Dr. Jette commented that this is part of the concern that happened over a long time in the district and we have to make sure the Board is aware of the projects and weigh in on them. He indicated right now there are plenty of concerns that can be pointed out in the schools that need to be addressed.

Mrs. Harrison indicated the improvements are those that have been identified in the Capital Plan. She commented the funds in this grant will not be spent on salaries or any other items that have not been identified in the plan.

Ralph Boehm, 6 Gibson Drive, referenced the ventilation cost and commented the list greatly exceeded \$600,000 - \$700,000. He indicated the State did a good job of managing the COVID situation. He commented that he believes the ventilation can be handled by CARES Act funds the State has.

Hearing no further comments, Mr. Byron indicated there is a request by five people for a secret ballot. All registered voters will use Secret Ballot #2 to vote for or against the article.

Voters marked their secret ballots and the ballots were collected and counted.

Vote on Article 1:

Yes: 54

No: 14

The Moderator indicated that Article 1 was passed by a vote of 54 to 14.

The Moderator thanked all who attended and accepted a motion to adjourn at 6:50 p.m. The motion was seconded. The motion passed unanimously by voice vote.

A true record of the
Litchfield School District Special Meeting,
Prepared by:



Michele E. Flynn
Administrative Assistant to the
Litchfield School Board
September 22, 2020

A true record of the
Litchfield School District Special Meeting
Attest:



Theresa Briand
School District Clerk for the
Litchfield School District
September 22, 2020