

**NORFOLK BOARD OF FINANCE
MINUTES OF APRIL 12, 2022 MEETING**

Members present were: M. Sconyers, G. Allyn, S. Anderson, G. Mudge, N. Ritson and J. Tarrant.

Alternate members present were: L. Battis, A. Bennett and K. Hester.

The meeting was called to order at 7:30 p.m. by M. Sconyers. The meeting adjourned on motion of M. Sconyers, second by G. Allyn and unanimously approved at 7:31.

The meeting reconvened at the Botelle Hall of Flags at 7:37.

M. Sconyers thanked M. Riiska for allowing the Boards to meet at Botelle School.

Under 2/3 vote, M. Sconyers moved to allow A. Bennett to resign, second by J. Tarrant and unanimously approved.

The March 8, 2022 minutes were approved on Motion of J. Tarrant, second by S. Anderson, and unanimously approved.

The Botelle Board of Education Budget was presented by John Deshazo. Botelle returned to full attendance before many others. While there were difficulties with online and hybrid learning, the school community is happy to return to full in-person events, including the Little Mermaid play which was sold out, and the first play since 2019.

Next year's student population is likely to start at 63-64 students for 2022-2023 school year, which is down from the 72 that are currently enrolled.

The Board of Education passed their budget on March 17th and reflects a 1.08% budget decrease, while the Northwest Region 7 budget reflects a 2.45% increase (Norfolk's share is 6.43%, or up \$103,529 from last year).

The BOE reported that most of the increases are due to subscriptions, supplies and contracts and the new CT Right to Read legislation, which mandates specific changes to literacy instruction. The BOE is working with Ed Advance to have a consultant tailored to their specific student population.

One of the most significant decreases in the budget is due to decreasing numbers of enrollment and the need to move to a multi-age model. The last classes that will be joined are 5th and 6th combined to one (1) upper grade. Class sizes are small but do allow for diversity within single classes.

There is a decrease of \$92,178 in salary/benefits by reducing one (1) full-time teacher, which represents an overall reduction in teacher salaries of approximately \$55,000.

The Budget represents an increase of \$13,500 for a para position previously paid for by a grant due to COVID. There is an increase of \$3,000 for cultural enrichment programs. The PTO has supported much of these programs. The Board wants to ensure cultural programs are well-funded and lead to more interactions with peers from more schools. The Chairman of the BOF questioned if this expense was previously paid by the PTO, why is it now being added to this budget. The Board's reply was that it wants to give kids every opportunity to participate with other students, including at Colebrook, have field trips, invite students from other schools to Botelle, especially as the population goes down.

There is an increase to Improvement of Instruction of \$28,800, which is estimated based on the hours for the curriculum consultant as part of the Right to Read legislation. The Chairman of the BOF questioned the increase. Mr. Deshazo stated that the Board must comply with the Right to Read mandate. This is a consultant that Ed Advance is providing who will come up with a specific curriculum to meet the mandates. Teachers have significant work in adapting to multi-age classes. Mr. Deshazo emphasized that the Right to Read is an unfunded mandate. One board member inquired if resource teachers can cover the mandate. Mr. Deshazo replied that this is different, new curriculum that is being developed. It is assumed that the cost is for this year only, the notion is the curriculum will be developed and money will not need to be spent in the coming years.

There is an increase of \$21,870 for heating oil, with a placeholder cost of \$3.00 per gallon. The Board realizes savings by purchasing through a statewide cohort of schools.

There is an increase for walkie-talkies and operational snow blowers. Botelle only has one snowblower that is operational. There are 7 walkie-talkies, but not enough are operational to be in all of the places they are needed as they are critical to security.

The BOE received a refund of \$9,000 from the bus company because they did not use one of the routes they contracted for through February.

The BOE will be paying for seven (7) security cameras that need replacing at a cost of \$13,000 and \$3,900 for electrical work for stage lighting out of the current budget.

The fixed contract with Ed Advance to provide for all cafeteria services is increasing by approximately \$550.

The total budget is \$2,396,700, which includes a decrease from last year's budget of \$25,910.

The BOF questioned why the Medicare line has increased with fewer employees and asked that the BOE have an answer at the Special Meeting of the BOF scheduled on April 19th.

The Chairman of the BOF asked about renewing discussions about consolidation. The Board indicated they have had mostly informal discussions with the people of Colebrook. It would be great if they could reach an agreement to consolidate with Colebrook. The BOE is trying to build a positive relationship about moving forward through good will, encouragement, and keeping the community atmosphere moving forward.

The First Selectman asked the BOE what they will be doing for transportation costs for next year. The fuel for Allstar has historically been handled through the Town Hall. The Town will no longer be responsible for fuel. The First Selectman reported that Allstar Transportation is close to being one of the worst companies to deal with. Allstar told the Town in February that it needed to start paying \$3.95 for fuel and it is a huge issue for the Town. The fuel tank at the Town Garage has just been replaced with a metered unit. The Town cannot sustain the fuel costs. Mr. Riiska suggests the BOE contact Allstar. Allstar buses are not to fuel up at the Public Works after this school year is over.

M. Sconyers wants to defer a vote on approving the BOE's budget until a Special Meeting of the BOF on April 19th.

One BOF member questioned utilizing Ed Advance for the reading mandate. The BOE indicated that Ed Advance provides a lot of services from special education to cafeteria services, that they are consultants and the local regional agency and that the BOE has positive experiences with Ed Advance.

Under Correspondence, the tax collector's request for reimbursements and suspensions were approved on Motion of N. Ritson, second by J. Torrant, and unanimously approved.

The First Selectman reported as follows: The Town finished up the winter season positive on salt budget coming in \$10,000 below budget. However, the Town was over budget on overtime. Public Works crews were out 44 times during all kinds of weather, often on weekends and holidays for multiple hours. One truck broke down but fortunately CIRMA paid for the \$8,500 repair. There have been multiple issues with a lot of vehicles largely because of the deicing materials on the roads. Other than Public Works, everything else is pretty much in line. The First Selectman handed out packets containing the Board of Selectman budget for next year with an income summary, budget summary, complete budget, etc.

The First Selectman wants to bring to the Board's attention long term debt of \$113,000 for the payout for two (2) bridges. The total cost of the bridges is approximately \$4,000,000, with the Town financing about \$1,000,000 at 2.25%. Payments start in January, though they might get pushed out. The \$113,000 payout is per year for ten (10) years, there might be a small surplus next year.

The BOF needs to be aware of the Capital line of \$120,000 to convert the tanker truck into a plow truck. The truck has low miles (15,000 miles) and is in very good condition. One member asked the price of a brand-new plow truck compared to converting the tanker truck. The First Selectman indicated the chase is \$160,000, the full price would be in the \$225,000 range. The tanker truck will not be available until January or February and the Town will definitely need one the following year. The First Selectman does not believe the Town can afford to finance another truck for \$230,000 and is trying to be frugal. He feels the \$120,000 conversion is fairly reasonable.

The First Selectman indicated he will need to take money out of Capital Reserve to pay the balance of the chase for the tanker truck. The balance of the truck itself, once completed, will be \$212,000. While the First Selectman is not a proponent of spending American Rescue Plan funds, if the \$221,000 comes in July, he suggests it gets held back and paid on the tanker instead of going out and borrowing.

The First Selectman indicated that the following year's budget will include Maple Avenue, which is going out to bid next October for \$2,100,000; the new firehouse, going out to bid next November for \$4,000,000 at a minimum; and replacement of the roof at Botelle for \$1,300,000 to \$1,500,000, these three very costly items. The First Selectman mentioned the Town borrowing \$7,500,000, not knowing where funding will come from – at an interest rate of 3.5% is an annual payment of \$400,000, the Town will need to be prepared.

The Treasurer reported that things are good. The Tax Collector's report is right on. The Tax Collector gave the Treasurer another \$100,000 which will be reflected on next month's report.

Public Comment: one person emphasized the need for Public Comment to take place at the beginning of the meeting. Chairman Sconyers replied "noted".

On motion of J. Torrant, second by N. Ritson, and unanimously approved, the meeting adjourned at 8:16 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Jennifer M. Ryan, Secretary