

DELIBERATIVE SESSION MINUTES
FEBRUARY 7, 2008

Moderator Bob Goodrich called the meeting to order at 7:10 p.m. The meeting began with the Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag and a moment of silence for a safe return of all of the military personnel serving overseas in this time of war.

School Board attendance: Sue Kimball, Pam Tibbetts, Scott Booth, Jeff LeDuc, Martha Williamson, Business Administrator; Barbara Munsey, Superintendent; Robert Ciandella, Legal Council and Robin O'Day, School District Clerk.

Budget Committee attendance: James McGeough, Jeff Harris, Tom Dwyer, Jr., Paul Spidle, Amy Randall, Sandy Osgood, Michelle Cromarty and Brenda McCartney.

Chairperson Jeff LeDuc read an opening statement from the school board complimenting the school district in reaching their testing goals a year earlier than expected. He thanked all administration, teachers, paraprofessionals and support staff as well as students for their hard work. He stated that policies are being updated on an annual basis to provide the best learning environment for our students.

Moderator Goodrich read rules of Procedure for the Deliberative session.

Article 1. To see if the Epping School District will vote to approve the cost item included in the collective bargaining agreement reached between the Epping School Board and the Epping Education Association which calls for the following increases in salaries and benefits at the current staffing levels:

Year	Estimated Increase
2007 - 2008	\$0
2008 - 2009	\$367,450
2009 - 2010	\$429,197

and further to raise and appropriate the sum of \$367,450 for the upcoming fiscal year, such sum representing the additional costs attributable to the increase in salaries and benefits over those of the appropriation at current staffing levels paid in the prior fiscal year.

Recommended by the Epping School Board
Recommended by the Epping Budget Committee

Sue Kimball made a Motion to accept the article as written. Seconded by Scott Booth. Jeff LeDuc presented Article 1.

Mr. LeDuc explained that teachers have agreed to pay an additional 5% towards health insurance, work one additional day in the school year and elementary teachers would extend their day by 15 minutes. Epping is ranked 104 out of 159 with regards to teacher pay scale for the State of NH. It was explained that if the teacher contract does not pass this year the district runs the risk of losing more good teachers to better paying districts. It was also discussed that the district cannot continue to train teachers in specialized areas like math and reading and then have them leave to other districts for better pay and benefits.

Kim Sullivan suggested that the board explain the contract figures to the people to make them more understandable. Mr. Sullivan wanted to know what was the actual gross percentage of the raises would be over the 3 year period of the contract.

Superintendent Munsey explained that in the first year there would be no raise and no step increase and the second year 2008-2009 there would be a 4% raise and a 1.5 step increase for teachers not on top step. The third year 2009-2010 there would be a 4.5% raise and a 1.5 step increase for teachers not already on top step making up the lost step in 2007-2008 over a three year period saving the district money. She stated that the voters needed to realize that more than 50% of district teachers are already at their highest level of step increases so many of them will only be getting a pay raise and no step increase. She also stated that it was difficult to give an exact percentage of step increases because they all depend on where a teacher falls on the step scale. If you are a teacher who would be receiving both a raise and step increase then it would be approximately 17%-19% increase overall for the 3 year contract. If a teacher is at their maximum step then they would be receiving 8%-9.5% increase overall for the 3 year contract. Superintendent Munsey explained that when you look at what teachers agreed to in their proposed contract it shows that teachers are giving up about 2.9% of incentives over the 3-year contract including paying 5% more of health insurance, working an additional day, and adding more time to the elementary school day. Superintendent Munsey also talked about steps being somewhat difficult to understand, but explained that it is similar to a small company not being able to hire at the same salaries as larger companies. There is an understanding that the difference would be made up over time.

Superintendent Munsey spoke on the improvement on student testing that was just released. In reading 7% more students tested in the proficient area with an overall increase of 14% in 2 years. In math there was a 5% increase with an overall increase of 13% in 2 years. There were 60 new students who went from non-proficient to proficient in 2 years.

Paul Spidle from the Budget Committee asked the Board to include the cumulative contract cost of \$1,164,097 to the warrant article so that people could know the real number and not have to try and figure it out for themselves.

Mr. Spidle made a Motion to amend Article 1 to add, "The cumulative total of this contract equals \$1,164,097 over the 3 years". Seconded by Dianne Gilbert. Tom Sutcliffe stated that no law exists that says cumulative numbers cannot be placed in the language of the article. Superintendent Munsey stated that she felt the district has been very open about the actual costs by including tax impact figures on information and that placing a lump sum number in the language is misleading. Ms. Killen felt that adding the amendment to the language of the article is misleading and could result in the possibility of people not voting for the article because they do not understand the overwhelming number. Board member Sue Kimball stated that voters are intelligent enough to know that raises are accumulative and that the amendment is unnecessary. Superintendent Munsey explained that cost of benefits and salaries of the contract are included in the article. Mr. Spidle stated that the budget committee asked the board to put the total number on the article and the school board declined.

Mr. Sullivan made a Motion to move the question. Seconded by Sue McGeough. Moderator Goodrich took a vote to add the amendment to Article 1. Amendment failed.

Colleen Schmidt and Mark Vallone spoke in support of Article 1 and encouraged voters to support it for their children and to help the district keep good teachers.

Article 2. To see if the Epping School District will vote to approve the cost item included in the collective bargaining agreement reached between the Epping School Board and the Epping Paraprofessional Association NEA-NH and NEA which calls for the following increases in salaries and benefits at the current staffing levels:

Year	Estimated Increase
2008 - 2009	\$70,668
2009 - 2010	\$50,500
2010 - 2011	\$46,121

and further to raise and appropriate the sum of \$70,668 for the upcoming fiscal year, such sum representing the additional costs attributable to the increase in salaries and benefits over those of the appropriation at current staffing levels paid in the prior fiscal year.

Recommended by the Epping School Board
Recommended by the Epping Budget Committee

Sue Kimball made a Motion to accept the article as written. Seconded by Pam Tibbetts. Sue Kimball presented Article 2.

Member Kimball explained the benefits of keeping paraprofessionals who are trained by the school district to deal with some of our most needy students and the importance of retaining these dedicated professionals in our school district. There are approximately 50 paraprofessionals in this district at an accumulative cost of \$359,125 for the 3-year contract.

Susan McGeough stated that most of the paraprofessionals work one on one with many special needs students but work with other students in the classroom as well. She also stated if the Epping School District wants to keep moving forward, we need to keep our staff here and not pass all the training benefits to other districts.

A paraprofessional who works in the district stated that you could invest in your children by supporting the proposed contracts.

A question was raised regarding the cost to the district for replacing staff who have left the district. Superintendent Munsey explained that the district did not have an actual cost figure, but there were ramifications. The district has trained our staff and our staff have good resumes as a result. She explained that last year the district lost 6 to 8 teachers to area districts. These teachers were able to realize a salary increase of \$6,000 to \$10,000. It was also important to note that area districts also pay more toward health insurance for both teachers and paraprofessionals. It is more than just salary. However, the majority of our staff have decided to stay to the benefit of Epping students. It was noted that it was important for the district to focus on staff retention rather than improving other school districts.

Article 3. Shall the Epping School District raise and appropriate as an operating budget, not including appropriations by special warrant articles and other appropriations voted separately, the amounts set forth on the budget posted with the warrant or as amended by vote of the first session, for the purposes set forth therein, totaling \$15,263,075? Should this article be defeated, the default budget shall be \$15,234,587, which is the same as last year with certain adjustments required by previous action of the Epping School District or by law or the governing body may hold one special meeting in accordance with RSA 40:13, X and XVI, to take up the issue of a revised operating budget only.

Recommended by the Epping School Board
Recommended by the Epping Budget Committee

Sue Kimball made a Motion to accept the Article as written. Seconded by Pam Tibbetts. Jeff LeDuc presented Article 3.

Member LeDuc explained that the School Board held the bottom line on the budget to the best of their ability.

It was stated that if the proposed budget is not voted in and the district is faced again with a default budget the custodians, food service and support staff raises will not be covered. Superintendent Munsey reported that custodians, food service and support staff did not receive wage increases this school year. These staff members are the lowest paid employees in the district and cannot afford to go another year without a raise.

Before discussing Article 4, Jim McGeough took a moment to recognize Brenda McCartney and Liz Conrad who will be stepping down from the budget committee this year. Between the both of them they have given 20 years of service to the budget committee and he thanked them for their years of service to the Town of Epping.

Article 4. Citizens petition per J. LeDuc, T. Gauthier, J. McGeough, et al. Shall we rescind the provisions of RSA 40:13 (known as SB 2), as adopted by the Epping School District on March 14, 2000, so that the official ballot will no longer be used for voting on all questions, but only for the election of officers and certain other questions for which the official ballot is required by state law? (3/5 ballot vote required – no tax impact)

Recommended by the Epping School Board

Sue Kimball made a Motion to accept Article 4 as written. Seconded by Scott Booth.

Paul Spidle spoke on behalf of keeping SB2 and stated that the amount of voters has increased since implementing SB2. He believes there are flaws in the law but those flaws need to be addressed at the state level not by going back to the old town meeting.

Kim Sullivan stated that many voters are misinformed and that the old form of town meeting should be brought back so there can more open discussion between both sides of issues.

Jeff LeDuc stated he believes that the leaders of the town of Epping recognize that change is needed when it comes to the way voting is done in the town of Epping and that is why he authored the Petition Article.

There will be a public hearing to discuss all sides of the petition on February 18, 2008 at 7:45 p.m. at the Epping Town Hall.

Grace Lavoie stated she feels people are more informed than the leaders who brought this petition forward are giving them credit for. She stated that many people watch EPTV to become informed on the issues and that the old form of voting was mostly a popularity vote because it was intimidating to speak or vote openly about how you felt on issues.

Jim McGeough felt that the petition will at least get people talking about how to improve voting in the town.

A Motion was made by Chris Vallone to move the question. Seconded by Andy Vallone. Moderator Goodrich took a vote to move the question. Motion passed.

Article 5. To transact any other business which may legally come before this meeting.

Kim Sullivan wanted to know where the District stood on the lawsuit that was brought forward by The Epping Residents for Principled Government. Superintendent Munsey stated that the suit will be heard in the Federal Court around November and the legal costs to the District to date are approximately \$50,000.

Tom Dwyer thanked Jim McGeough for his time and service on the Budget Committee. Mr. McGeough will be stepping down from the Budget Committee when his term ends in March.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:45 p.m. Moderator Goodrich reminded people that there will be a candidates' night on the last Wednesday in February at the town hall and that voting will take place at the Epping Middle School on March 11th. He encouraged all to take the time to vote on March 11th.

Respectfully Submitted,

Robin A. O'Day
School District Clerk