

1 CONWAY MUNICIPAL BUDGET COMMITTEE AGENDA
2 PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT CENTER
3 KENNETT MIDDLE SCHOOL
4 CONWAY, NH

5
6 January 31, 2024, at 6:30 PM
7
8

9 The meeting was called to order at 6:30 PM. The following Budget Committee members were present:
10 Steve Angers, Bill Marvel, Ellin Leonard, Michael Lacey, Bob Drinkhall, Vice-Chair Frank Jost, Chair Peter
11 Donohoe, Jim LeFebvre, Steven Steiner, Randy Davison, Quentin Lewis, Stacy Sand, Ryan Shepard.
12

13 **Absent-** Dave Jensen, Terry McCarthy.
14

15 **Pledge of Allegiance-** Chair Peter Donohoe led the Pledge of Allegiance.
16

17 **Town Budget Discussions Warrant Article Review**
18

19 R. Shepard- you all are familiar with the police station project, which is fairly cut and dry and has not
20 changed at all. You will see with this package you have received information about the 25-year land
21 lease between the town of Conway and Arch Solar. In the past companies reached out to the town to
22 work with us but it never came to fruition. What this is, is a lease Kearsarge Solar would actively be
23 doing all the building themselves, this is all their project they just enter into a lease with the Town of
24 Conway. Th change you see is this secondary change of wording and the change of wording which I
25 believe was per the request of the selectmen Tibbeadeu.
26

27 S. Sand- how much are you leasing it for?
28

29 R. Shepard- I do not know at this time. The concern was finding a place to put it first.
30

31 F. Jost- I was going to ask the same, and I understand this is in the beginning stages. But finding out the
32 revenue source would be nice to know.
33

34 S. Sangers- will this be limited to the cap of the landfill? Is there future consideration of cutting further
35 into the town owned tree clearing to expand it to the town owned property?
36

37 R. Shepard- the same group inquired about wooded land it is not being explored, it did come up briefly,
38 right now they are only looking at the caped land space.
39

40 Q. Lewis- are they a private or govt company?
41

42 R. Shepard- I believe they are private, the impression that I got from Paul D, is that this is a good deal
43 for Conway, and this is a good company to work with.
44

45 P. Donohoe- if we have further questions on this for the article, we still have time.

46 F. Jost- on page 7 that it was \$1,000 per acre at 6 acres, so \$6,000 a year.
47
48 Ellin Leonard- I do not think we should make any decisions on this before we get more information.
49
50 P. Donohoe- I have a question about the bond article.
51
52 R. Shepard- this authorizes the BOS to issue a negotiate bond we are going off a 5.5% rate as of that
53 quote. The question was presented about the interest rate and if the interest rate were too high would
54 we be able to pass on it, if so choose to.
55
56 B. Marvel- we asked the BOS to present something similar to what the school did, and I think we
57 should consider that.
58
59 ***Jim LeFebvre in consideration of the increase in property tax burden that Conway homeowners***
60 ***recently suffered, motioned that the Municipal Budget Committee ask the Conway Board of***
61 ***Selectmen to reduce their budget requests to equal the default budget, which is \$486,000; seconded***
62 ***by S. Angers.***
63 **Vote in favor 8-3-2**
64
65 **School Budget & Warrant Article Review**
66
67 J. LeFebvre- I have a question from the audience that I would like to read. Why do payments for lost or
68 damaged Chromebook go into the general fund instead of being put into the IT account to offset
69 replacement cost?
70
71 Kevin – typically unanticipated revenue all goes back to the general fund.
72
73 B. Marvel- the pressing question is have we had an answer from the schoolboard on our request.
74
75 P. Donohoe- no I have not heard anything yet.
76
77 B. Drinkhall- I have a problem with how it has been reported because it has been stated that the
78 budgeters cut 2 million from the schools. We did not, it was simply a recommendation for the school
79 board, and I think this is very misleading.
80
81 P. Donohoe- I would take it one step further to say its borderline inflammatory.
82
83 S. Angers- in an interview the superintendent said it was time to close the school, I wonder what the
84 thought process was by the board to close the school a year from now instead of this budget cycle.
85
86 R. Davison- last meeting we were presented with the operational budget and closing one elementary
87 school, it almost comes in collision with the default budget, so adding the operational cost in one
88 elementary together what was presented was \$1,270,992. The default is \$1,170,099, so that was
89 presented, and a vote was taken for 2025.
90
91 S. Angers- within the default budget was there a school closure>

92 R. Davison- not within the default budget.
93

94 S. Angers- so if I correctly understand the default budget does not include closing a school.
95

96 R. Davison- Correct. With the bond going away it helps pay for the new teacher contract of \$500,000
97 and the increase in Health insurance. It is sort of a saving as the town is not raising and appropriating.
98

99 E. Leonard- I would like to make an observation. 3 years ago, the budget committee talked about
100 saving \$1.2 million by closing a school. And it was said then that 1.2 million was not worth closing a
101 school and it was not a substantial amount of money to worry about. I think 1.2 million is a lot of
102 money we all want to make the town scrimp and cut and the school does not. I think that cut needs to
103 happen this year.
104

105 B. Marvel- I think it is possible to meet that 2 million cut without cutting programs. And there are some
106 programs that can be cut, and it does not have an impact I think that the numbers can be met, there
107 are an assortment of administrative positions that could be looked at. There are a number of vacant
108 positions that have remained unfilled that we can live without and go along without them. It's my
109 feeling and it does not seem to be a unanimous feeling, but people have been hit hard with the reval
110 and then hit harder again with the school increases.
111

112 S. Sand- I plead with the board to get creative and look at other means of cutting vs cutting programs. I
113 hate having these practical conversations and the town getting blamed for tax increases and it being a
114 town wide increase. I know we can be creative. I plead with the school board to please come up with a
115 plan to make cuts. If it is not 2 million then come up with a different plan. Come up with a solution as
116 you are a part of the reason for the tax increase. Try and look ahead and plan accordingly. People
117 cannot afford to pay their taxes; they do because they are afraid to lose their homes.
118

119 R. Davison- a rep of the school board, I voted no to the global budget and in favor of the default. The
120 issue is we cannot ever get anyone to commit. I do not think it good to throw a new superintendent
121 into the closure of a new school, I think we should have closed it this year.
122

123 S. Angers- one of the worst things you can do to a professional is leave them hanging not knowing
124 where their future is. They are not going to hang in the breeze waiting for a decision. We have a
125 massive talent drain. I do not know how anyone could sleep at night playing the fear factor on this, no
126 child is going to be left behind, no child is not going to get their education. It is a bunch of bologna. We
127 have professional teachers here, buildings do not teach, teachers teach and the teachers that stay here
128 in the consolidation are going to get the best education they can. It is a bunch of bologna, and so the
129 school needs to close the school now, this budget cycle period end of story, rip the band aid off. Let the
130 new superintendent look at what is going to be going on here, a professional administrator is not going
131 to drop themselves off into the middle of this.
132

133 B. Drinkhall- we are overstaffed in the schools.
134

135 S. Sand- all the new buildings that we are seeing is not for families. A lot are 1- and 2-bedroom
136 apartments. The reality is there is going to be new housing, but I do not see another large influx of
137 students coming into the school system.

138
139 J. LeFebvre- another discussion is the fact that students are being pulled and going into charter
140 schools. What are they getting that is better and different than Conway is providing,
141
142 P. Donohoe- we had a presentation at our last meeting there were an onerous amount of warrant
143 articles that we reviewed, many of which had to do with the Conway Village Fire District recognizing
144 the changes that are going to come forth in 2025. Amy Snow is here, and she has kindly offered to
145 answer any questions that anybody may have.
146
147 S. Angers- is there a threshold from where a Fire Dept needs to switch from a volunteer to a paid dept.
148
149 A. Snow- as far as Conway FD, it is considered volunteer, but they are paid. East Conway is completely
150 volunteer FD.
151
152 A. Snow- the Town has custody of every trust fund from East Conway to Center Conway to Conway
153 Village, North Conway, all the cemeteries, the private ones, the trustees of the trust fund have custody,
154 but the town does not necessarily have authority to spend from them. If there a Conway Village Trust
155 Fund then only Conway Village can draw from those and what we have to do is we have our
156 commissioners make a motion to spend that money cause they are agents to expend, and then we
157 have to write a letter to the trustees of the trust fund to get that money , and then they give it to us,
158 the citizens of Conway.
159 The citizens have been investing in these trust funds for the fire trucks, to replace fire trucks, to replace
160 ambulance water & sewer trucks and equipment and to maintain infrastructure. So, Conway Village at
161 our annual meeting is going to have a warrant article to change ownership of said trust funds to the
162 town of Conway and then the town of Conway must accept those. The money is already there, the
163 money will just be transferred. These articles are not raising and appropriating any money, it is just the
164 town accepting the money.
165
166 P. Donohoe- what if the warrants do not pass?
167
168 A. Snow- we would have to talk to a lawyer about that.
169
170 E. Leonard- I do not understand why the town is so broken up into so many districts, and we are always
171 fighting about taxes and services.
172
173 A. Snow- in the past it had to do with how the town was laid out and the geography and fire trucks
174 getting to areas.
175
176 E. Leonard- we have to think about future land use. Where I live in, we have 120-130 acres of land and
177 we only use 5 acres, because the town required us to have that much acreage for the 96 apartments. If
178 we had more effective land management, we could have moderately priced housing.
179
180 **New Business**
181
182 P. Donohoe- We will not meet again until the public hearing on the 14th at the school at 6:00.

183 I wanted to bring up something that I have worked on in late March. I want to have a board wide
184 discussion on the schedule, and I want to talk to all of you about the ideas that I have put together. I
185 have created a mock schedule where we will shift many of the January meetings to earlier in the fall
186 and do a town deliberation in a slightly different manner than we have done them before. The school
187 schedule would stay intact. It is asking the town to move up their budget deliberations a little. I think 2
188 or more 2–3-hour meetings a week in January on end is too much, and I would like to have a discussion
189 with you all about ways in which we can change that. I am not sure we can, but I would like to have the
190 discussion.

191

192 **Public and Media Questions and Comments**

193

194 Mike Gregorio Conway School Board Chair & Fire Commissioner- I'm pretty disappointed at the last
195 meeting that we attended, you said that you weren't going to vote on anything until we had a chance
196 to sit down and talk, and I assumed at that time it would be a back and forth as to what numbers you
197 guys were all going to come up with, but then we find out on the same night that we decided to close
198 down a school, you guys go ahead and voted on \$2 million recommendation. How do we talk about
199 working together when we pull a number like \$2 million out? And a lot of that seems to be revolving
200 around the fact that we returned \$3 million. That 3 million that was returned because we had to shift
201 people around in order to meet requirements of the law, then we had title 1 money that came in, and
202 grant money that administrators go out and get. That is what creates that \$3 million in fund balance
203 that was returned. And so, all you understand is the school board has full authority to spend every
204 penny of that. We did not have to return a nickel this past cycle. We could have picked a bunch of stuff
205 that we wanted to go out and do but we did not because it is not right. So, we should get some credit
206 for that rather than be punished for returning 3 million. It seems like you are all punishing us for
207 returning the money. I want to talk about the 2-million-dollar number and where is that breaking
208 down, that number is outrageous. There is no question if we close a school that money will not be
209 spent. It took 20 years to convince people to close a fire station. We want direction. What are you
210 supporting and what are you not and is it just the budget that you are after? Closing the school was not
211 also recognized tonight, we have been trying for years to do that. I wanted it to close this cycle as well,
212 but we could not. To me I think the recommendation could have been \$600,000. I want to add more
213 after school enrichment. We have a lot of kids hanging around after school. You are not going to get
214 the school board to support that \$2million recommendation. If a reasonable number comes out and a
215 good suggestion, then maybe people will support that. You have to give us more directions. I have to
216 focus on fixing the buildings and supporting the union contracts.

217

218 P. Donohoe- I see that the school board has an almost impossible agenda trying to balance the interest
219 of the student community, the interest of the taxpayers and all of this building and infrastructure that
220 we have. I do think there was progress made by the board on the vote that you made. Our job is to
221 look at the budgets and signal where we think there are adjustments that should be reconsidered and
222 perhaps signal a change in direction. I will speak for the board, but the request was primarily focused
223 on the budget. I support the AFSCME contract and the maintenance priorities.

224

225 B. Marvel- we did not cut your budget by \$2 million, we asked that you look at it again. I see several
226 areas where money could be cut.

227

228 M. Gregorio- until we decide what to do with all the buildings, we have to continue to fix them. We
229 had a conversation on what to do with buildings. We need to decide what to do as a group collectively.
230
231 J. LeFebvre- has anyone considered a Jr. Sr. High school inside the current facility?
232
233 M. Gregorio- I believe it has been looked at a bunch of times.
234
235 S. Sand- you have not even decided which building to close and what you will repair or not. Our
236 purview is to make recommendations based on the budget and we look at percentages. We asked that
237 you look at 8% not 24%. The only place to cut to get the big dollars is in the buildings.
238
239 Steven Steiner- the building needs to close this year. If it does not happen this year, it will not ever
240 happen, you will get a new board, and it will not pass.
241
242 R. Davison- my take is at the deliberative they will put the two million back in. as a board take a stand
243 and go for the default budget, vote for that dollar amount.
244
245 Kevin- So when you look at the cost for students, it is important to recognize that the student class size
246 is 16.7 and some are 20. When you look at cost per pupil \$1.2 million is a lot. The board is looking at all
247 the spending and health insurance costs. When you take a look at cost per pupil. There are eight
248 districts out of fourteen and we are number nine. There are more savings that we are looking at, and
249 more ways to reduce costs, but I truly think it is a funding piece that is driving the decisions to be so
250 aggressive at this point when I recommended the administration putting that report together about
251 closing an elementary school, we want to do it well we want to do it respectfully.
252
253 S. Sand- if two million is too much then come back to us with something to consider. If \$800,000 is
254 better than come back to us with that.
255
256 Barbara Lyons- at our last meeting was when we discussed closing the school, we discussed rebranding
257 and having the students involved and renaming schools and renaming mascots and colors and all that
258 stuff. So rather than dividing it based on numbers and money and percentages. We need to stop the
259 division and make a decision sooner than later on what school is closing its causing everybody on edge.
260
261 **Adjournment**
262
263 ***P. Donohoe motioned to adjourn the meeting.***
264 ***Vote in favor 13-0***
265
266
267 Respectfully Submitted,
268
269 *Alicia Gipson*
270 Recording Secretary