

**RIVENDELL INTERSTATE SCHOOL DISTRICT
PUBLIC BUDGET FORUM**

District Office – Orford, NH & via Zoom
January 30, 2023 – 6:00 p.m.

Members Present: Jason Knowles (Fairlee); David Ricker, Terry Martin (Orford); Nate Thames, Kathy Hooke (Vershire), Rebecca Wurdak, Sarah Molesworth (West Fairlee); Sara Day (at-large)

Members Absent: Dav Gagner, Clement Powers (Fairlee); Vanessa DeSimone (Orford)

Administration and Staff Present: Nancy Murphy (Business Manager), Steve Lindemann (Samuel Morey Principal), Keri Gelenian (RA Principal), Sara Rose (Westshire Principal), Andy Stevenson (Staff), Miranda Garrow (Staff), Rachael Coleman (Staff), LeeAnn Senecal (Staff), Kristina Claflin (Staff), Kaitlyn Townsend (Staff), Jillian Bacon Hatch (Staff), Barb Griffin (Staff), Gayle Justynski (Staff), Leda Rodis (Staff), James Bourn (Staff), Matt Jung (Staff), Tanya Libby (Staff), Leslie Berger (Staff), Melissa Arnesen-Trunzo (Staff)

Public Present: Mark Burger, Tami Sullivan, Stuart Bacon, Annette, Erin Cilley, Cassia Kriezis, Staci T, Debra, Brooke, Noel Walker, Jessica Enright, Ryan's iPhone, Jamie Blondin, Jon Lester, Emily Knaeble, Sarah, Laura Craft, Tonya Gunn, Holly, Pol Llovet, Marc McKee, Simon Holdaway, Caroline's iPhone, jctr, Abby Hood, iPhone, Shannon Bradley, Cassia Coutinho, Bree Showalter, Lauren Warbin, Charlie Smith, Jenn Carter, Kim Nutter, Chris Dyke, Charlotte Holt

I. Call to Order: Meeting called to order at 6:00 p.m.

II. 2023-2024 Preliminary Budget: Kathy Hooke presented a PowerPoint that provided an overview of the drivers behind the 2023-2024 budget and tax rates. She explained we are faced with a tax rate increase for all four towns. Nancy Murphy stated the off-step salary increases for teachers were significant this year, along with an over 12% increase in the cost of health benefits. She added that out of district placements have increased by one-third this year. Murphy reviewed the expenditure report and explained the increases/decreases to the budget lines. There was discussion about the number of students served in the PreK programs in relation to the operational expenses and concern about the lack of students utilizing bus services. The board was encouraged to conduct a viability study of the district based on the decreasing population. Murphy spoke about the large increase in the athletics budget and equated it to the increase of the rental of the community fields from the Town of Orford (\$29,000). Several individuals asked for a more detailed break out of the budget as had been done in previous years. Murphy explained the change was due to the shift in software programs and added that anyone can request a more detailed report and it will be posted to the website once the school board has approved a budget number. There was discussion about the increase of special education costs, lack of enrollment in the Expedition Classroom, and ADM decrease. Hooke explained it has been difficult to staff the Expedition Classroom which has limited the ability to accept tuition students into the program. Nate Thames said the rate of increase for special education is unsustainable. There was discussion about the increase to business services which Murphy explained is partially related to changes in the staffing model, but the real driver is an increase to worker's compensation insurance costs. One parent spoke of his positive experience with special education at Rivendell. It was explained that the current budget proposed does not include any staffing reductions; it is a status quo budget. Hooke added that while voters vote on the budget number administration may still move to a specialist model at the elementary schools. Thames added that if the budget as presented were to fail then the multiage conversation would be back on the table. Concerns were raised on the lower CLA rates and the impact on tax increases with an opinion this will make it unaffordable for young families to live here. Hooke mentioned that Vermont taxpayers may qualify for income sensitivity and not be as affected by the CLA. Murphy stated that less than 50% of our families have completed the free and reduced lunch application and there was discussion on how to make that process easier. A comment from the public raised concern about Rivendell's high budget compared to similar schools and asked if closing a school should be considered. David Ricker stated this has been looked at previously and would not yield a substantial saving, but might need to be looked at again.

III. Adjournment (Action)

Action: Motion was made to adjourn (Thames/Ricker) **Approved by show of hands.**
Meeting adjourned at 7:44 p.m.

Recorded by:
Brenda Gray
Executive Assistant/HR Manager

Note: All Board votes were unanimous unless noted otherwise.