

## Town of Hudson Budget Committee meeting 01-05-2022

### A.Call to order

Chairman Weissgarber called the meeting to order at 7:00 PM.

### B.Pledge of Allegiance

Chairman Weissgarber led the Pledge of Allegiance.

### C.Attendance

**Members Present:** Chairman Mr. Richard Weissgarber, Vice-Chairman Mr. William Cole, Mr. Norman Martin, Mr. Shawn Murray, Mr. Robert Clegg, Ms. Grace Hopkins, Ms. Kathy Leary, School Liason

Vice Chair Ms. Diana LaMothe, Selectman Liaison Brett Gagnon, and Clerk Mr. Alejandro Urrutia. Also, in Attendance School Superintendent Lawrence Russell, School Business Administrator Ms. Jennifer Burk, School Assistant Superintendent Kim Organek, and other school staff members, directors and principals.

**Members Absent:** Alternate Clerk Mr. Ted Trost (excused).

### D. Public Input

\*Nobody in attendance presented input to the meeting but, Hudson resident Ms. Peggy Huard emailed the Budget Committee the following note related to warrant article number **7 Transfer of Property to the Hudson Lions Club**. Ms. Huard wrote: "Of note, transfer of property and HOS playground go hand in hand. Take a look at the attached map. The field that is proposed to be transferred is the open space at the back of ELC(HOS). This property belongs to HOS. It used to have a playground on it. It was removed and field was basically stolen or given for baseball! THIS is an area these K children have a right to play on but are not! WHY? This is a very deceptive area that is not being fully disclosed!"

Peggy

### E. Acceptance of Minutes

Mr. Martin moved to accept the minutes from December 08,15, and December 16th 2021 meetings; Ms. Hopkins seconded the motion; the motion passed (9-0-1), Mr. Urrutia abstained.

### F.Reports from Liaisons

#### a. Select Board

Mr. Gagnon indicated there was nothing to report.

#### b.School Board

Vice-Chair Ms. LaMothe reported that the school Capital Improvement committee report was finalized and approved by the school board on December 20th. It is posted on the SAU81 website on the facilities page. It was modeled after the town Capital Improvement plan.

### G. Roll Call on SAU 81/School Board Warrant Articles 2022-2023/Wrap Up

Ms. Burk presented the Warrant Articles

## **Warrant article 1 Operating Budget**

### **Recommended by the Hudson School Board 5-0 Budget Committee**

Mr. Martin handed out the committee members six pages with a list of his reasoning and explanations of proposed cuts to the School Budget.

Mr. Martin made a motion to remove \$668,984 from the school budget.

Mr. Murray seconded the motion for discussion.

During the discussion, Mr. Martin elaborated the reasons behind his proposed cuts, considering that in the middle of the pandemic, many families and businesses are experiencing economic hardship.

Ms. LaMothe suggested reviewing line by line the proposed cuts to allow the school officials to explain these items. Superintendent Russell said that reviewing item by item would be lengthy, and they need time to be prepared and to have all the pertinent information on hand.

Chairman Weissgarber called for roll call with the following result:

Mr. Clegg, **yes**, Mr. Cole, **Yes**, Mr. Gagnon, **no**, Ms. Hopkins **no**,  
Ms. LaMothe, **no**, Ms. Leary, **no**, Mr. Martin, **Yes**, Mr. Murray, **yes**,  
Mr. Urrutia, **no**, Mr. Weissgarber **abstain**.

The motion fails 4-5-1

Mr. Clegg stated his objection to the Selectman Liaison and School Board Liaison participating in the vote as **unelected** officials to the Budget Committee.

Chairman Weissgarber called for the roll call for Warrant Article **1** as read by Ms. Burk.  
Members voted as follow:

Mr. Clegg, **abstain**, Mr. Cole, **no**, Mr. Gagnon, **yes**, Ms. Hopkins **yes**,  
Ms. LaMothe, **yes**, Ms. Leary, **yes**, Mr. Martin, **no**, Mr. Murray, **abstain**,  
Mr. Urrutia, **yes**, Mr. Weissgarber **abstain**.

## **Warrant Article 2 Collective Bargaining Agreement between the Hudson School Board and PSRPs**

Mr. Martin asked if this is not a cola raise how the school arrived at those numbers. Ms. Burk explained that several items were cost items that were negotiated, so it includes a special education stipend for those that work in specific special education programs it has a new longevity clause that was added to the contract, there was a reduction in the second year for the contribution towards the health insurance which only applies to who are the full-time staff members in the food service department and the school did have adjustments in wages for paraprofessionals and food service individuals.

Mr. Murray asked what the percentage rate of the two years increase is; Ms. Burk answered that it averages out 3.67%

Mr. Murray asked for clarification if only the Food Service workers pay a different Healthcare. Ms. Burk said only full-time workers are eligible for health insurance, and this only applies to

food service staff in this contract. The district currently contributes 92%, but it will be dropping to 91%.

Mr. Murray indicates that he will abstain from voting because his wife is a school employee. The roll call for warrant article 2 was as follows: Mr. Clegg, **yes**, Mr. Cole, **abstain**, Mr. Gagnon, **yes**, Ms. Hopkins **yes**, Ms. LaMothe, **yes**, Ms. Leary, **recused**, Mr. Martin, **yes**, Mr. Murray, **abstain**, Mr. Urrutia, **yes**, Mr. Weissgarber **yes**.

Ms. Burk presented warrant article 3:

### **Warrant Article 3 Collective Bargaining Agreement between the Hudson School Board and AFSCME**

The roll call for warrant article 3 was as follows: Mr. Clegg, **yes**, Mr. Cole, **abstain**, Mr. Gagnon, **yes**, Ms. Hopkins **yes**, Ms. LaMothe, **yes**, Ms. Leary, **yes**, Mr. Martin, **yes**, Mr. Murray, **abstain**, Mr. Urrutia, **yes**, Mr. Weissgarber **yes**.

### **Warrant Article 4 Collective Bargaining Agreement between the Hudson School Board and the Secretaries**

#### **Recommended by the Hudson School Board 5-0 Budget Committee**

The roll call for warrant article 4 was as follows: Mr. Clegg, **yes**, Mr. Cole, **abstain**, Mr. Gagnon, **yes**, Ms. Hopkins **yes**, Ms. LaMothe, **yes**, Ms. Leary, **yes**, Mr. Martin, **yes**, Mr. Murray, **abstain**, Mr. Urrutia, **yes**, Mr. Weissgarber **yes**.

### **Warrant Article 5 Partial Roof Replacement at Nottingham West Elementary School**

Mr. Clegg asked how much money is in the capital reserve for school repairs. Ms. Burke said about \$500,000 is in the school renovation fund. Mr. Clegg asked if any other funds in the reserve funds can be used to do repairs right now in school buildings. Ms. Burk indicated that there are no additional funds to repair facilities. Mr. Clegg asked if undesignated funds could be used for repairs, and he wondered if voters approved 2.5million. Ms. Burk clarified that the voters approved retaining 2.5% for emergencies or to offset tax rates. Mr. Clegg asked for clarification if, besides the \$500,000, no other funds could be used for repairs. Ms. Burke answered that she is not aware of additional funds for repairs.

Vice-Chairman Cole asked if the school district got any American Rescue money. Ms. Burk indicated that the American Rescue money would primarily be used for learning loss, which was the target for the program. Roof replacements and other things that the school has that are ongoing maintenance and scheduled items the school does not have any plans to use American Rescue funds; that was not the intent of the funds for things that already had plans and scheduled with for budget. Vice-Chairman Cole asked what the school would do if the warrant article did not pass. Ms. Burk said it would be presented to the voters again next year. Mr. Cole asked why the SAU did not use part of the American Rescue money to fix the roof; also, he wondered how

much money the school would get from the American Rescue; Ms. Burk said the school district will receive \$6000,000 in grants.

School board Vice-Chair LaMothe said she consulted with the School Board Association regarding ESSER funds. They are mainly one-time expenditures based on COVID-related needs, and it's an extensive approval process with many obstacles to pass. So, for construction purposes, it would very unlikely to get approval.

Vice-Chair Cole said he does not have any document related to the school, but he was on the committee pertaining to the town utilization of the money in anything you can think of; he believes the school can use that money in anything, including the roof, that is from the Town side said Mr. Cole who asked for a document showing the limitations for the school.

The roll call for warrant article **5** was as follows: Mr. Clegg, **no**, Mr. Cole, **no**, Mr. Gagnon, **yes**, Ms. Hopkins **yes**, Ms. LaMothe, **yes**, Ms. Leary, **yes**, Mr. Martin, **yes**, Mr. Murray, **abstain**, Mr. Urrutia, **abstain**, Mr. Weissgarber, **abstain**.

### **Warrant Article 6 Increasing Funds in the Capital Reserve School Renovation Fund**

Mr. Murray asked how much money was in the School Renovation fund, Ms. Burke answered \$500,000. Mr. Murray asked when was the last time used; Ms. Burk indicated that it was used in 2017 for an elevator.

Vice-Chair Ms. LaMothe referred to a spreadsheet and, based on it, said that it was used for the elevator in 2015 and in 2018 it was used for Alvirne gym and library roof.

Chairman Weissgarber asked why \$150,000 and what it be used for. Ms. LaMothe indicated that up to \$150,000 is coming from the end of the year unexpended fund balance, so the tax impact is zero. It's designated for school renovation. The school board has been looking at the Alvirne renovation and other projects that might be down the road.

Vice-Chair LaMothe referred to the Capital Improvement Committee Report where the projects are described. Still, the expenses are not finalized yet and are in a preliminary stage. Other items like an elevator or improvements that could be considered would be presented as warrant articles to be approved by voters.

Mr. Murray indicated that they definitely have their benefit for long-term strategic planning and capital reserve funds. Mr. Murray asked how does the capital reserve fund interact with the town. Ms. LaMothe answered that it does not interact with the town.

Mr. Murray thought there was a statute that said the school district had to submit a capital improvement plan to the town.

Ms. LaMothe said that the school would report to the town planner if anything is coming up, but they're separate entities funds.

Vice-Chairman referred to the Capital Improvement Reserve Fund, getting back to the Chair's question about how the school arrived at \$150,000 dollars. Ms. LaMothe answered that the balance that exists in there now is approximately \$500,000. The school board looked at what was spent from the fund over the years; like was mentioned before, the elevator was \$300,000. The school was looking at what was used in the past and what is a reasonable balance to have in there to cover future needs. Mr. Cole asked how it is related to the school renovation plan and what it includes.

Vice-Chairman Cole asked Ms. LaMothe if it is available for school district-wide use of that money; Ms. LaMothe indicated that is the case. Mr. Cole said that if the warrant article passes, the school could use the money to repair the roof. If there is money sitting there, said Vice Chair Cole, why is the school asking for more money from the voters to pay something that the school can do right now?

Ms. LaMothe said that the process that's been followed is as the roof warranties end roofs have been replaced, and those have been separate warrant articles. Ms. LaMothe referred to what Mr. Pratte explained about the roofs. Assuming this one article passes, then two other roofs have to be taken care of, and then there's going to be a time where there won't be roof replacement repair maintenance-type items proposed. The General Capital Reserve will cover all the other Capital Improvement needs aside from roofs.

Mr. Murray asked who's the agents to expend on that Ms. Burk said that there are no named agents to expend, so it would require a warrant article.

Mr. Clegg made a statement about how money that's leftover and doesn't get returned to the taxpayers is no effect on the tax rate. Mr. Clegg disagrees. He said it does \$150,000 dollars that do not go back to the town and don't have to be raised; it's not free. The school believes that the money left over belongs to the school, and it doesn't affect the taxpayer. Mr. Clegg said that because the unspent money is over the school being spent on anything, the school still has to raise a certain appropriation amount. People didn't have the money anymore, so Mr. Clegg announced that he would vote no again. He thinks the school should use the money they have and give the tax rate break to the town's citizens.

Chairman Weissgarber said that he is concerned about this warrant article because the voters do not get the budget committee's information; the voter only will see that the school is asking \$150,000. Most likely, they will vote no. On Warrant articles that do not explain the reasons behind them, the voter will vote no. Because there is not enough explanation.

Vice-Chairman LaMothe hopes more people watch the meetings and deliberative gatherings on TV.

Ms. Burk said that the school would prepare a voter guide that they expect will give enough information to the voters before going to the polls.

Ms. LaMothe says that any unexpended funds are returned to the town at the end of the year, and in the fiscal year 2021, \$2.4 million was returned to the town.

Mr. Clegg asked how much was not returned to the town

how much is it to not return to the town; everything about that could have made a difference in the people's tax rate.

Ms. LaMothe explained that the school had retained \$500,000. Vice-Chairman Cole indicated that \$500,000 are added to the \$600,000 already there, making a \$1,100,000 of retained balance. Selectman Gagnon is asking if the School Renovation Fund can be used to fix the roof.

Chairman Weissgarber answered that the School Renovation fund could be used to fix the roof if the voters approve it.

Selectman Gagnon asked why the school wouldn't take money from the Renovation Reserve Fund instead of having a separate warrant article to fix the roof.

Ms Hopkins explained that doing that will make it necessary to fund the capital reserve, and then the following year, you have to have a warrant article to spend the money, so you've got to look ahead two years to spend that money out of the fund.

Ms. LaMothe said that it is possible to see the water damage already done if the school delays another year. It will be more expensive to fix.

Mr. Clegg referred to selectman Gagnon's question saying that he could change this warrant article on the floor by saying to appropriate the money from the Capital Reserve Fund to repair the Nottingham West School roof. It will not be the first time this action has been done.

Ms. Leary concurred with Mr. Clegg's assertion.

Chairman Weissgarber asked if money could be used as an emergency to fix the roof.

For example, can part of the 1.2 million be used as an emergency. Ms. Burksaid that she is not sure if the liking of the roof will meet the definition of emergency established by the Department of Education.

Vice-Chair LaMothe said that an emergency defined by the Department of Education would be if the roof collapses.

Mr. Clegg said that an emergency is when the liking causes damage to the structure for several reasons, including mold. Mr. Clegg offered to call the commissioner and asked him.

Ms. LaMothe indicated that she looked at the RSA, she has consulted with the attorney, and the emergency could e related to education needs or catastrophes. The leaking of the roof is a maintenance item and does not fall in the category of emergency as defined.

Vice-Chair Cole asked why the school could not take the money from the \$6000,000 American rescue fund and take care of the roof before it collapsed. Mr. Cole asked why we could not take the money to care for a certifiable emergency. Mr. Cole said that he personally does not care what the Department of Education says because the Boards represent Hudson. Ms. LaMothe says that she would appreciate it if the Budget Committee approved it, but the education commissioner will not support it.

The roll call for warrant article 6 was as follows: **Mr. Clegg, no**, Mr. Cole, **no**, Mr. Gagnon, **yes**, Ms. Hopkins **abstain**, Ms. LaMothe, **yes**, Ms. Leary, **abstain**, Mr. Martin, **no**, Mr. Murray, **abstain**, Mr. Urrutia, **abstain**, Mr. Weissgarber, **no**.

### **Warrant Article 7 Transfer of Property to the Hudson Lions Club**

**Budget Committee did not discuss this warrant article because it is not a money-related issue. \* read the public input section of these minutes.**

### **Warrant Article 8 Add Playground to Dr. H.O. Smith Elementary School**

Mr. Murray asked Ms. Burk to define a special warrant article. Ms. Burk explained if the school weren't able to complete it in one year, it would be allowed to carry on into the second year.

Mr. Murray said that the school hasn't used money retained from the fund balance over the years you've done projects like it did with the tennis courts and all those things and why go to the voters for \$75,000 when you know you're going to have a fund balance. Mr. Murray asked why the school go to the taxpayers and asked them for something in that amount when the school probably is projecting to have a non-expended fund balance.

Ms. LaMothe said that asking the voters is a matter of transparency.

Vice-Chairman Cole stated the warrant article does not explain much; he wondered if is a playground there or whether it is unsafe. What the warrant article says is not enough to inform the voters properly, said Mr. Cole.

Ms. Hopkins said that she remembers at a meeting there was a pretty extensive presentation on what this playground was like and they can't have kids go outside. However, they use it on

alternate days because of not enough space. There was a little map there during the presentation and many discussions, so this information was presented.

Ms. LaMothe reminded that the school welcomes the Budget Committee to tour the schools to see the needs firsthand.

Mr. Murray said that he heard the explanation, but his point is the \$75000 in a warrant article is probably the one issue he wouldn't complain about the unexpended fund balance because the school can get it done this spring.

The roll call for warrant article **8** was as follows: **Mr. Clegg, no**, Mr. Cole, **no**, Mr. Gagnon, **no**, Ms. Hopkins **yes**, Ms. LaMothe, **yes**, Ms. Leary, **abstain**, Mr. Martin, **no**, Mr. Murray, **no**, Mr. Urrutia, **abstain**, Mr. Weissgarber, **no**.

H. Other Business/Comments.

Ms. LaMothe, Mr. Clegg, Ms. Leary, and Mr. Urrutia insisted on the necessary participation of taxpayers in the Public Hearing and Deliberative sessions.

Vice-Chair Cole suggested that the school board invite the committee to visit the school where is an issue during the year; in the spring, the committee is not that busy and not ten days before the deliberative sessions.

Ms. LaMothe reminded the committee that she had mentioned several times that the school is open to visits.

Vice-Chairman Cole made a motion that sau81 provide a copy of the current Hudson School District job description for the following positions Interventionist, in-school suspension coordinator, and instructional coach.

Mr. Martin seconded the motion.

**The motion passed unanimously.**

Chairman Weissgarber thanked Mr. Martin for his diligent work dissecting the school budget, and he said he would review Mr. Martin's notes and encourage all the committee members to do the same.

I. Adjournment

Motion to adjourn by Mr. Martin seconded by Mr. Gagnon the motion passed unanimously.