

**TOWN OF PITTSFIELD
ANNUAL SCHOOL DISTRICT MEETING
March 16, 2017**

The Annual Pittsfield School District Meeting was held at the Pittsfield Elementary School on Thursday March 16, 2017. School District Clerk Erica Anthony called the meeting to order at 7:06PM. The Pittsfield Girl Scout Troop 10540 led the *Pledge of Allegiance*.

District Clerk Anthony explained that School District Moderator Arthur Morse had moved out of Pittsfield and per NH State Statute 197:20 the clerk “shall act as moderator of any meeting until a moderator pro tempore shall be chosen, if the moderator is absent or the office has become vacant”. School Board Chairman Michael Wolfe made the motion to appoint Erica Anthony as Moderator pro tempore. School Board member Bea Douglas seconded the motion. A card vote was taken and the motion passed.

Moderator pro tempore Anthony stated that this was ultimately the voters’ meeting and her job was to facilitate the meeting. She quoted former Moderator Morse, “It is okay to disagree, but not to be disagreeable.” She asked if everyone had the chance to pick up the “Rules of Procedure” from the back table and asked if there were any questions. There being none, she introduced those on the stage: School Board member Ralph Odell, School Board Chairman Mike Wolfe, School Board member Bea Douglas, School Board member Ted Mitchell, School Board member Linda Freese, Superintendent of Schools Dr. John Freeman, School District Financial Manager Sally Blanchette, and School District Attorney Jay Boynton.

Moderator pro tempore Anthony discussed the option of allowing non-residents from the Pittsfield School District administration and School District legal counsel the opportunity to speak, should questions arise during the meeting. Fred Okrent moved to allow the school district administration and school district legal counsel to speak and answer questions during the meeting. Seconded by Bill Miskoe.

Moderator pro tempore Anthony read the introduction to the posted 2017 School District Meeting Warrant:

To the inhabitants of the town of Pittsfield Local School in the county of Merrimack in the state of New Hampshire qualified to vote in school district affairs are hereby notified and warned of the Annual Meeting will be held as follows:

Date: March 16, 2017

Time: 7:00 PM

Location: Pittsfield Elementary School

Moderator pro tempore Anthony read the results of the March 14, 2017 School District Elections:

One School Board Member for a three (3) year term –
Michael Wolfe elected – 288 votes

One School District Treasurer for a three (3) year term –
Roberta Maxfield elected – 357 votes

One School District Moderator for a two (2) year term –
Gerard LeDuc (write in) elected – 17 votes

Ballot Article:

Shall we adopt the provisions of RSA 40:13 (known as SB2) to allow official ballot voting on all issues before the Pittsfield School District on the second Tuesday of March?
(By Citizen Petition)
(3/5 majority ballot vote required)

Yes – 193 No – 120 Ballot Article passed.

ARTICLE 01 To hear reports

To hear the reports of agents, auditors, committees, or officers chosen, and to pass any vote relating therefore. **Recommended** by the Pittsfield School Board. (Majority vote required.)
Recommended by the Pittsfield Budget Committee (Majority vote required).

Motion made by School Board Member Linda Freese to approve Article 01 as read, seconded by School Board Member Ted Mitchell.

Moderator pro tempore Anthony opened the floor for discussion.

No discussion.

Article 01 passed by card vote.

ARTICLE 02 School Lunch Program

To see if the Pittsfield School District will vote to raise and appropriate the sum of \$330,000 for the support of the School Lunch Program. This appropriation will be funded by a like amount of revenue from the sale of food and state and federal sources. (Estimated tax impact of this article: \$0.) **Recommended** by the Pittsfield School Board. **Recommended** by the Pittsfield Budget Committee (14 yes, 0 no). (Majority vote required.)

Motion made by School Board Member Ted Mitchell to approve Article 02 as read, seconded by School Board Member Linda Freese.

Moderator pro tempore Anthony opened the floor for discussion.

Merrill Vaughan asked the School Board how the bill before Congress regarding federal cuts to school programs and the possible introduction of a voucher program may affect the lunch program.

School Board Chairman Mike Wolfe stated they currently do not have any information on the possible impact as this issue is currently still in the discussion phase.

There being no further discussion, Moderator pro tempore Anthony called for the vote.

Article 02 passed by card vote.

ARTICLE 03 Receive and expend grant funds

To see if the Pittsfield School District will vote to raise and appropriate the sum of \$1,100,000 for the support of federal and private foundation grant-funded educational programs of the Pittsfield School District. This appropriation is contingent upon receiving revenue from federal grants and private foundations and will be expended in accordance with federal and state requirements upon approval by the New Hampshire Department of Education or private foundation requirements. (Estimated tax impact of this article: \$0.) **Recommended** by the Pittsfield School Board. **Recommended** by the Pittsfield Budget Committee (14 yes, 0 no). (Majority vote required.)

Motion made by School Board Member Bea Douglas to approve Article 03 as read, seconded by School Board Chairman Mike Wolfe.

Moderator pro tempore Anthony opened the floor for discussion.

Scot Palmer asked if federal funds were not received, would there be an impact on the budget.

Superintendent Dr. John Freeman stated that if the funding is not received, the school does not spend it.

There being no further discussion, Moderator pro tempore Anthony called for the vote.

Article 03 passed by card vote.

ARTICLE 04 Operating Budget

To see if the Pittsfield School District will vote to raise and appropriate the Budget Committee's recommended amount of \$10,105,763 for the support of schools, for the payment of salaries for the school district officials and agents, and for the statutory obligations of the district. This article does not include appropriations voted in other warrant articles. (Estimated tax impact of this article: \$2.49/thousand.) Recommended by the Pittsfield School Board. Recommended by the Pittsfield Budget Committee (9 yes, 5 no). (Majority vote required)

Motion made by Budget Committee Chairman Bob Schiferle to approve Article 04 as read, seconded by School Board Chairman Mike Wolfe.

Clayton Wood presented a written request signed by six registered voters: Clayton Wood, Rachel Wood, James Pritchard, Diana Levesque, Lucien Levesque and Keith Donovan that the vote for Article 04 be taken by secret ballot.

Steve Adams asked for a point of order. Mr. Adams stated that the body had the right to discuss the article before the secret ballot vote, which gives the people the opportunity to amend the article if desired. He asked if the secret ballot was for an amendment, or on the final article.

School District Attorney Jay Boynton stated another written request could be made to have a secret ballot on any amendments in addition to the already requested secret ballot.

Moderator pro tempore Anthony opened the floor for discussion.

Diana Westgate asked why five members of the Budget Committee did not recommend the operating budget.

Budget Committee Chairman Bob Schiferle explained there was little room to make additional cuts without substantially impacting the students. The Budget Committee recommended reducing the overall amount by \$100,000.00 to be raised, which in turn the Committee recommended taking from the Special Education emergency fund surplus.

Budget Committee member Adam Gauthier explained he voted against recommending this budget amount. He believed more funds could be taken from the Special Education fund and favored reducing an administrative position.

Budget Committee member Helen Schiff agreed an administrative position could be eliminated.

Budget Committee member Louis Houle stated the School Board had already prepared to reduce the School District staff by eight positions before presenting their budget to the Budget Committee. He explained there was an unanticipated increase of approximately \$600,000.00 to the special education budget. He explained the Special Education Fund referenced by Bob Schiferle is meant for any unanticipated additional special education costs and cautioned depleting the fund. He stated the committee heard the concerns of the people at the public hearing regarding increases in taxes and agreed with them, but the School Board has cut just about everything possible from their budget. He stated the NH legislature had reduced state aid significantly.

Bill Miskoe asked the School Board to look into additional revenue sources, such as bringing in tuition students from other towns, such as Epsom.

School Board Chairman Mike Wolfe responded that the School Board had approached other school boards. He spoke with the Epsom School Board, and a member questioned why would

they consider Pittsfield if Pittsfield was going to shut down their school. Most boards, including Epsom, responded that they were locked into contracts. He encouraged people to come to the Board meetings or meet with him personally to offer suggestions. The Board welcomes the input.

Bill Miskoe responded that he was told by an Epsom School Board member that they were not locked into a multi-year contract.

Merrill Vaughan thanked the School Board and the Budget Committee, but is concerned that all these cuts will drive good teachers away. He felt the body needed to take the students into consideration, and that it was our responsibility to prepare them for the future.

Diane Rider asked for the cost per student.

School Board Chairman Mike Wolfe stated it was approximately \$17,000.00 per student.

Budget Committee member Adam Gauthier asked, given the proposed reduction in state aid and rise in special education, did the School Board have a plan in place to compensate.

School Board Chairman Mike Wolfe responded they did not. He explained in an effort to save money the State had cut the stabilization grants and that Pittsfield was scheduled to lose \$85,000.00 per year over the next 25 years resulting in a \$2.2 million loss in revenue. He stated that he and Carl Anderson have met with people from other towns affected, including Berlin, Gorham, Franklin and Claremont, and they are trying to convince the legislature to change their minds. If that does not work, the next step would be legal action.

Noreen Rollins asked if the eight positions due to be cut were currently filled or were any vacant.

School Board Chairman Mike Wolfe confirmed the positions were all currently staffed.

Budget Committee Chairman Bob Schiferle explained why he supported the proposed budget. He stated the Budget Committee went through this budget line by line. The School Board proposed a bare bones budget. He believed any further cuts would have a direct impact on the students. He believed there is no waste and the money has been spent prudently. He attended several School Board meetings and noted they scrutinized every expenditure. He is confident the school is spending his tax dollars wisely. He encouraged everyone to support the budget.

Amanda Masse stated there are 23 students in her daughter's elementary school class. She asked if cutting the eight positions would affect class size. She felt the number of students with special needs in the classroom and the extra attention they need was already impacting her daughter's education.

Superintendent Dr. John Freeman responded that they couldn't eliminate eight positions without impacting students. However, they were working on a plan and that there was a policy already in place limiting the class sizes in the primary and secondary elementary classes. They will do their best to impact the students as lightly as possible.

Budget Committee member Helen Schoppmeyer stated the Budget Committee agonized over the school budget given the cuts they had already made. She is a senior citizen with limited means but supports the budget. She believed we all owed it to the students to provide them with a good education.

Bill Miskoe stated the budget was not sustainable.

School Board Chairman Mike Wolfe stated eliminating the positions was a very difficult decision, but the Board realized they could not ask for support of a higher budget. The special education costs this year drove the budget up. They have little control on what they can cut. Much is mandated. Other options to cut included Kindergarten, which is not mandated by the State of New Hampshire, or the athletic programs, both of which would be devastating to the students.

Chris Hemmah asked what would happen if the budget does not pass.

School Board Chairman Mike Wolfe stated the body would discuss an amended budget figure.

Budget Committee member Helen Schiff asked if the eight positions included both teachers and support staff.

Superintendent Dr. John Freeman confirmed the eight positions would include teachers and other staff, but that final decisions had not yet been determined.

Budget Committee member Helen Schiff stated even if someone voted not to support the budget as presented, it did not mean they didn't support education.

Sandra Found asked if the budget does not pass would it go to a default budget. It was confirmed that was not the case for this budget.

Budget Committee member Fred Hast stated he had six children go through the school system and all were successful. He asked the voters to support the budget.

Budget Committee member Louis Houle stated there was an unusually high increase in special education costs this year which is not the norm. He stated if people wanted to be upset with someone, they should be upset with our elected state representatives.

Scot Palmer asked for the number of employees, teachers, and average number of students graduating.

Superintendent Dr. John Freeman responded 140 total employees and 65 teachers. He stated last year was a low year of 24 graduating students, but looking back over the last 10 years there was a high of about 35 students.

Diane Vaughan asked how SB2 would affect this budget.

Moderator pro tempore Anthony explained this budget will be voted upon during this meeting. With the passage of SB2, the budget for next year would be voted upon by ballot vote after a deliberative session was held.

Diana Rider asked how many students participate in online programs.

Director of College and Career Readiness Melissa Brown confirmed over 100 students participate in online courses.

Budget Committee member Gail Nickerson asked if there was anyone representing the taxpayers on the Special Education team when discussing the student educational plans. She felt if fewer students received services, the tax impact would be lower.

Superintendent Dr. John Freeman responded students with special education needs are identified through assessments and a variety of testing. The ultimate goal is to do what is best for the kids.

Randy Severence made a motion to amend the budget amount to \$9,846,477.00. It was seconded by Diane Rider.

Moderator pro tempore Anthony re-read the article with the proposed amended budget figure of \$9,846,477.00. She then opened the floor for discussion on the amendment.

School Board Chairman Mike Wolfe encouraged the voters to vote against this amendment. He stated if this amount passed, it could result in the loss of approximately six more employees. It would be devastating to the school and the community.

Diana Levesque stated she has two children in the school system and has a vested interest in the school. She is very concerned about the future of the town if we do not support the students and the school.

Wayne Summerford believed there were other cuts that could be made other than personnel.

Budget Committee member Helen Schoppmeyer encouraged voters to vote against the amendment. She asked for clarification on the special education cost increase this year.

Superintendent Dr. John Freeman stated four students with out of district placements moved into Pittsfield this year which increased the special education costs by \$623,705.00.

Budget Committee member Helen Schoppmeyer explained that these special education costs are mandated. She believed to reduce the budget to last year's figure would be a disservice.

Stan Bailey believed there were other adjustments that could be made to the budget, including eliminating the extra bus run on Wednesdays and eliminating some of the educational assistant positions.

Lee Corson stated he recently moved to Pittsfield. He did some research before choosing to come here and one of the factors was the good things he learned were happening in the schools. He believed it was important to support education.

Paul Nickerson stated he had six children go through the school system. There had been some issues, but there have been big changes thanks to the Superintendent and the School Board.

Kathy Traynor asked if the amended article failed, could it be amended again. It was confirmed it could.

Merrill Vaughan commented on the large turnout for this meeting. He stated it was the kids' turn to get the education. They will be our leaders down the road.

There being no more discussion, Moderator pro tempore Anthony called for the vote. She reminded the body they were voting on the amended figure of \$9,846,477.00.

Moderator pro tempore Anthony felt the card vote was too close to call and asked the Supervisors of the Checklist to do a physical count.

The amended budget figure of \$9,846,477.00 failed by card vote. Yes – 70 No - 96

Moderator pro tempore Anthony asked if there was any further discussion on the original budget figure of \$10,105,763.00.

There being no further discussion, Moderator pro tempore Anthony re-read the article as originally proposed, and asked that all voters check in with the Supervisors of the Checklist to receive their ballot.

Article 04 passed by secret ballot Yes – 91 No - 87

Article 05: 3 year Collective Bargaining Agreement

To see if the school district will vote to approve the cost items included in the collective bargaining agreement reached between the Pittsfield School District and the Educational Association of Pittsfield Teachers which calls for the following increases in salaries and benefits at the current staffing level:

Fiscal Year 2017-2018

Estimated Increase \$113,319

Fiscal Year 2018-2019

Estimated Increase \$211,678

Fiscal Year 2019-2020

Estimated Increase \$304,055

and further to raise and appropriate \$113,319 for the current fiscal year, such sum representing the additional costs attributable to the increase in salaries and benefits required by the new agreement over those that would be paid at current staffing levels. (Estimated tax impact of this

article: \$.43/thousand) Recommended by the Pittsfield School Board. Recommended by the Pittsfield Budget Committee (9 yes 5 no). (Majority vote required)

Motion made by School Board member Bea Douglas to accept Article 05 as read. School Board member Linda Freese seconded the motion.

School Board member Bea Douglas spoke about the negotiation process and stated all parties worked very hard and kept in mind the tax burden when creating this proposed agreement. She believed the 1% increase and the continuity increase every five years is an incentive to keep our good teachers here. She stated huge progress has been made in our schools over the last six years and that is a testament to the dedication of the teachers and staff. She strongly encouraged everyone to support this bargaining agreement.

Clayton Wood presented a written request signed by six registered voters: Clayton Wood, Rachel Wood, James Pritchard, Diana Levesque, Lucien Levesque and Keith Donovan that the vote for Article 05 be taken by secret ballot.

Moderator pro tempore Anthony opened the floor for discussion.

Budget Committee member Adam Gauthier asked for clarification of the tax impact should the agreement pass.

School Board member Bea Douglas responded it would be \$.43/m for 2017-2018, \$.80 for 2018-2019.

Budget Committee member Adam Gauthier asked how much of the increase was for bonuses.

Superintendent Dr. John Freeman explained that it was a continuity increase, which is a different concept.

School Board member Bea Douglas stated the actual impact of the continuity increase is difficult to determine because we do not know how many teachers are going to stay. She explained the School Board recognized how difficult it is to pay the taxes and they felt this continuity increase was the best way to boost the teachers' pay with the least amount of tax impact. To be eligible for this increase a teacher would have to stay five years and would receive the increase their sixth year. It is not an across the board increase for everyone. It is an attempt to keep the excellent teachers we have here in District and to bring their pay somewhat closer to that of teachers in surrounding towns. She stated Pittsfield pays the third lowest salary in the State.

Budget Committee member Adam Gauthier stated he felt the teachers should pay more out of pocket costs for insurance.

Budget Committee Chairman Bob Schiferle reiterated that teachers in our district have the 3rd lowest starting salary in the State. He asked about teacher turnover this year.

School Board Chairman Mike Wolfe responded there was a 23% staff turnover last year.

Tracy Huyck stated she had a document that showed different figures.

It was clarified that Pittsfield has the third lowest starting salary.

Molly Brooks stated she is a parent, taxpayer and a teacher in a different school district. She felt the only way to have a town people want to stay in, was to support our school and teachers. She encouraged the body to support the contract.

Budget Committee member Gail Nickerson questioned whether long standing teachers were providing the same quality instruction as those new to the profession.

School Board Chairman Mike Wolfe stated they had a great group of very dedicated teachers, some of the most dedicated have been with the school many years. He stated we lose a lot of very good new teachers because they can't afford to stay at the current rate of pay. He believed this was a very fair contract.

Diana Levesque praised the seasoned teachers and said they were some of the best her two sons had.

Noreen Rollins asked if longevity incentives would be based on merit or the amount of time the teacher had been with the district.

School Board member Bea Douglas explained this continuity increase is based on the number of years of service. She stated her belief that the administration does a great job of making sure our teachers meet the expected level of standards.

Rick Anthony stated he was on the negotiation team and that the longevity increase was meant as an incentive to retain highly qualified teachers. He stated that regardless of how long a teacher is in our district all are held to strict standards and accountability. If a teacher is not performing they can be replaced, regardless of tenure. He stated we are currently training teachers for one to three years and they are leaving for better paying positions. The hope is this continuity increase will provide incentive for these teachers to stay in District. Pittsfield teaches in a very different way than when he started teaching here 23 years ago. Students right out of college do not have this training. Pittsfield is providing that training in our schools and to other schools.

Budget Committee member Louis Houle asked how the "Evergreen clause" affects this issue.

School Board Chairman Mike Wolfe stated the "Evergreen clause" no longer exists.

There being no further discussion, Moderator pro tempore Anthony called the question. She reminded the body that the vote would be by secret ballot and directed the voters to the Supervisors of the Checklist to receive their ballot.

Article 05 failed by secret ballot Yes – 81 No – 95

Article 06: Special meeting if Collective Bargaining Agreement

Shall the district, if warrant Article #05 is defeated, authorize the governing body to call one special meeting, at its option, to address warrant Article #05 cost items only? Recommended by the Pittsfield School Board. (Majority vote)

School Board chairman Mike Wolfe made the motion to accept Article 06 as read. School Board member Bea Douglas seconded the motion.

Moderator pro tempore Anthony opened the floor for discussion.

School Board Chairman Mike Wolfe explained the School Board would need to go back to the negotiation table with the teachers. Once an agreement had been reached the School Board would bring that agreement to the voters. He noted that the next vote would be through the SB2 process. He reiterated that after this meeting the School District would follow the SB2 form of voting.

Noreen Rollins commented that she would be more apt to support a new contract if the teachers contributed more toward insurance costs.

Merrill Vaughan asked what happens to the teachers if they do not have a contract.

It was confirmed that the teachers would receive their current compensation without any step increases.

There being no further discussion, Moderator pro tempore Anthony re-read Article 06 and called for the vote.

Article 06 passed by card vote.

ARTICLE 07 Transact Other Business

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

School Board Chairman Mike Wolfe made a motion to accept Article 07 as read. School Board member Ted Mitchell seconded the motion.

Moderator pro tempore Anthony opened the floor for discussion.

Budget Committee member Louis Houle thanked the Budget Committee and School Board for their hard work on this budget.

Scot Palmer made a motion to adjourn the meeting. School Board member Bea Douglas seconded the motion.

Moderator pro tempore Anthony adjourned the meeting at 9:44pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Erica B. Anthony
School District Clerk