

TOWN OF EAST KINGSTON
SCHOOL BOARD PUBLIC HEARING

DATE: 2/8/05
TIME 6:13 - 8:20 PM
PLACE: E. Kingston Elementary School

Present: R. Caron, School Board Chair
R. Poelaert, School Board
D. Miller, School Board
J. Eaves, Principal
J. Frew, Assist. Superintendent
N. Lunney, SAU 16 Assist. Business Manager

Visitors: Approximately 35-40 residence of E.K.

1. CALL TO ORDER

Meeting called to order at 6:13 PM by R. Caron, SB Chair.

2. The purpose of this meeting was to review the proposed EKES Budget for fiscal 2005-06. Handouts were available to the attendees. The Board was introduced. R. Caron turned the meeting over to N. Lunney, SAU 16 Assist. Business Manger, who reviewed the budget, with the aid of slides. Thanks to Peter Fennell for keeping the (sometimes) balky video equipment going.

Using pie charts and a summary of the budget, N. Lunney conducted a review of the budget that inspired many questions from a very engaged audience of voters. He reviewed the proposed warrant articles, highlighting the areas representing measurable increases in the '05-'06 budget (summary sheet attached). The total budget in article #1 is \$2,168,620.

Voters were interested in teacher/student ratios, and the Board explained the lack of "economy of scale" at the present time. It was pointed out that in the future, because of low class size, EKES will be in position to absorb more students without impact on the operating budget. The population in town is growing, and a higher number of students in the elementary school (as well as high school) can be expected. It is projected that the elementary school will not be at capacity until (at least) 2010. A 5-year collective bargaining agreement with the teaching staff has been negotiated and a warrant article for funding of the increases will be before the voters at the March meeting. The increase this year will be \$53,760. Some discussion regards the pay scale, tracking, COLA, etc ensued. Questions regards health insurance and the percentage of the cost covered by the staff was raised. Staff covers 10% of this cost.

Increase in SAU assessment greeted with a question regards the value we receive from the SAU, specifically, the input received from the Superintendent. A review of SAU assistance E. Kingston ensued, and R. Poelaert spoke specifically of Dr. Hanson's value as a resource for the Board, noting that he is always available to assist the Board with any matters of concern, is a professional of the highest caliber.

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State mandated testings of water, rising costs of utilities and heat, maintenance of the building and grounds, all add up to increases in the budget. Rationale for a proposed warrant article to set up an expendable trust for a Maintenance Fund in the amount of \$5,000, explained. R. Poelaert will be putting together a packet of information regards this area of the budget for one member of the audience who requested same.

Question regards where the Board stands on the "seat belt" issue raised; the Board, although in support of seat belts, deferred this matter to the Joint Board for deliberation. N. Lunney explained that certainly the concept of seat belts in buses is favored, but any decisions made probably won't be until renegotiations of a contract with the bus company in '06-'07.

N. Lunney reviewed Warrant articles 5 & 6, which allow the appropriation of fund balance to the future building expansion funds. He explained that these funds come from the state through the Adequate Education Grant, and the amount received is never a "sure thing," and will, no doubt be reduced in the coming years. Much discussion ensued regards the allocation of these funds for building expansion vs using them to offset taxes. The Board explained their rationale for establishing a capital reserve, noting that because of this practice, the recent addition to the school was "paid for" rather than bonded, and by 2010, EKES will be free of any debt service. Of course, any appropriations/spending from capital reserve must go before the voters for approval.

Mr. Jaques expressed his confidence in the manner in which this School Board conducts their business, with the best interest of the school and the taxpayer in mind, and hopes that future Boards will be as expertise in their decisions. Concern from the audience regards the needs in EK, including a new library, new police station, etc, recognized by the Board, and further noted that decisions on how any money is allocated, placed in reserve, etc. is all at the discretion of the voters. Question re how capital reserve funds are invested raised. The Trustee of the Trust Funds is limited by law in investing these funds, and at this time return is at a very low rate.

Food service: Fact that the service is self-supporting, discussed. Kudos to Mary Russell for her management of food service at EKES, and to Rob Caron for his work in acquiring equipment for the kitchen. R. Poelaert noted that R. Caron, who will not be running for election to the Board this year, made the kitchen his special project during his time on the Board, doing an exemplary job.

Question raised regards possibility of a ballot vote at the SD Meeting. Explained that, while possible, at a past SD meeting, a ballot vote was petitioned and this extended the time of the meeting into the late afternoon hours. In response to a question, the proposed budget will increase the tax rate by 54 cents/thousand.

Meeting adjourned at 8:20 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Iommie Levesque, Secretary