

## REPORT OF THE FINANCE COMMITTEE

### School Budget

**General Position:** Issues this year included a 20% increase in LHS tuition, contract negotiations for Faculty and Staff contracts for the next 2 years, a rise in the costs of Special Education and changes in employee benefits resulting in higher expenditures. The economic climate is challenging all over the Upper Valley and Plainfield is no exception. The Finance Committee regrets the large amount needed to make up the budget but we commend the hard work and long hours contributed by the School Board, the Administration, teachers, staff and community members in an effort to maintain the high quality of our educational programming and our school in the face of non discretionary cost increases and decreases in sources of Federal and State funding. As taxpayers ourselves, we appreciate the spirit of effort and compromise apparent in the results of the negotiation and budgeting processes.

The Finance Committee is concerned about the fundamental change in budgeting for the correct number of eighth grade students who will attend Lebanon High School each year. In recent years the School Board has budgeted for every eighth grader to attend Lebanon High School and set aside that amount of tuition in the tuition and special education reserve fund. This practice has resulted in an annual surplus to be returned to the taxpayers. The new plan will not budget for every eighth grade student and so will not provide that surplus although it will cut costs this year. We feel that this is a riskier approach to take with a tuition budget that can be adversely affected by unexpected new students moving into town or sudden increased costs in Special Education.

**Benefits Payable Fund:** We support the addition of \$25,000 to the Benefits Payable Expendable Trust Fund. We are aware that there will be greater demands placed on this fund soon because of shortfalls in the State of NH's retirement fund and so we agree with the measures the Board recommends to prepare for this need.

**Facility Improvement Bond:** Last year, we supported the funding of a prototype classroom we hoped would increase energy efficiency in the building and reduce energy costs. Over the last year, these efforts have been enormously successful. The Finance Committee unanimously agrees with the Board, Administration and the facilities Committee that the availability of State support for capital spending projects at this time, combined with low bond interest rates and the final payment of the year 2000 bond provide a favorable climate for a Facility Improvement Bond to expand this project and increase future savings while maintaining our Facility.

**Roof Repair Bond:** The Finance Committee supports using a five year bond to pay for this vital repair and if the bond does not pass, we support funding the Building maintenance fund with an additional \$40,000 and withdrawing the necessary money for the repair from that fund.

## **Town Budget**

**General Position:** The 2.11% increase in the Operating budget of the town represents a strong effort made by our town Administration, Department Heads and Selectboard to maintain the level of services we have come to expect while keeping our town affordable and solvent in times of increasing financial pressure.

**Article 5 Dump truck replacement:** The Finance Committee agrees with the recommendation of the Selectmen to purchase a new Dump truck and to sell or trade the existing truck. The ready availability of funding for this purchase in the Highway vehicle reserve Fund serves to emphasize the importance of consistent funding of the reserve funds annually so as to minimize the effect on taxes when these purchases must be made. We also appreciate the common sense approach of buying the last model of a proven truck rather than the first model of a new truck. This typifies the thoughtful approach to spending reflected in our town budgets.

**Article 8 Library organization:** The Finance Committee supports the creation of a unified library department for the town by merging the two existing boards of Trustees. We believe that a thorough examination of the best way to utilize and fund the two town libraries is called for in order to maximize the taxpayer benefit and improve cost efficiency.

In relation to our feelings regarding Article 8 , the majority of the Finance Committee does not support Article 9 to upgrade the Philip Read Memorial Library Director part-time position to full -time at this time. We are fortunate to have two wonderful libraries available to all the residents of Plainfield and support the maintenance and growth of both institutions. With that said, we would like to wait for the findings of a unified board of trustees before we move forward with Library development.

**Conclusion:** We believe that all voters must examine these issues carefully and participate in public discussion when possible so that we can make informed decisions for our town , our school and our tax dollars.

Respectfully submitted,

Stephen Beaupre, Sarah Brookes-Governor, David Chellis, Ann Grdø, Scott Madeay and Ted Moynihan