

FINANCE COMMITTEE REPORT-2014

Over the past year the members of the Finance Committee have attended the series of budget meetings of the Select and School boards of the Town of Plainfield. The community should take heart that there are many dedicated individuals that give generously of their time and talent to the serious business of operating our school and our town. Certainly there are a wide range of views within our community, but the discussions we observed, however energetic, were conducted with the civility and respect we would all expect. We offer the following report on our activities.

Proposed School District Budget

Article II - Budget

The district is proposing a budget of \$5,909,329. This is a reduction of \$214,470 or 3.5% below the base 2014/15 budget. Approval of any other warrant articles may affect this number.

There was an encouraging amount of discussion about creative ways for the District to adapt to economic and demographic realities. It is clear that the Board, SAU, and School administration have continued to devote significant resources to the future of our school system.

We commend the school administration for commissioning the special education study and making cuts to the budget in response as part of the larger process of “right-sizing” our school. We would support similar studies of other areas as part of this process.

There was concern expressed at the meetings that some cuts included might have unintended negative consequences.

Articles III & IV - Building Alterations

Articles III (Learning Commons) and IV (Lunch Service Area) are appropriately presented separately from the main budget as they are program changes. Both articles include related physical changes to the school building to realize the program changes embodied in each.

We feel the alterations associated with the Learning Commons proposal will positively impact learning opportunities and outcomes for students. It is less clear that the proposed Lunch Service Area is the most effective or efficient way to achieve the goals of increased collaboration for both staff and students.

Article V - Full Day Kindergarten

Our belief is that while a full day kindergarten program may have some appreciable benefits there is not yet consensus throughout the community. Voters should understand that this is an expansion of program and, although not projected to have additional cost for next year, may require another full-time teacher, possible investments in equipment, and physical alterations to the building if enrollment warrants it in the future.

Article VIII - Solar Panels

The finance committee did not have sufficient information to make a final recommendation on the installation of solar panels. However, it is our understanding that the solar panel warrant will not cost the school any money up front and is likely to save the district money in the long run. If the warrant is not approved this year the cost may increase if credits expire next year.

Summary

It will be important moving forward to continue to look carefully at a number of new initiatives as we seek to understand the true costs and benefits of proposals like leaving the AREA agreement and collaboration with Cornish. Our town thrives because we continue to discuss these publicly and carefully vet ideas in the public forum.

Proposed Town Budget

Article 3 - Budget

The selectboard is proposing an operating budget of \$2,101,932 for fiscal year 2015. This represents an increase of \$76,626 or 3.8% over the previous year. Overall we feel that the increase is justified, and that the town has produced a fiscally responsible budget. We applaud the selectboard for finding innovative solutions to cut costs while maintaining or improving the level of service.

Article 5 - Facilities Maintenance Fund

The finance committee supports creation of the facilities maintenance fund and expenditure in 2015 to address immediate needs at the town highway garage.

We also encourage the selectboard to create a town facilities committee to assess the current and future needs of the town buildings.

General Comments / Recommendations

The finance committee would like to thank the many members of the public for serving on a variety of town and district advisory committees (KUA, Cornish Collaboration, AREA Agreement, Energy Committee, Facilities Committee and others) who have contributed their time and talents to maintain a strong and forward thinking community.

As always, we strongly support efforts to increase participation of all residents and believe that our community will be stronger for it.

Rangj Keen, Eric Brann, Dan Lapan, David Grøbe, Audra Bucklin, Brad Atwater