

The Board of Education Town of Vernon

30 Park Street – PO Box 600
Vernon, Connecticut 06066

Paul Grabowski, Chair
Kristiana Wintress, Vice Chair
Karen Colt, Secretary
Anthony Bedlack
Patricia Buxton
Susan Jablonecki
Kriste Nucci
Simone Sewell
Mason Thrall

Date: January 24, 2024

APPROVED MINUTES

BOARD OF EDUCATION SPECIAL MEETING BUDGET WORKSHOP

A Vernon Board of Education Budget Workshop was held via Zoom Meeting and in-person on Wednesday, January 24, 2024.

1.0 Establish Quorum

Board members present in-person: Paul Grabowski, Kristiana Wintress, Karen Colt, Anthony Bedlack, Patricia Buxton, Susan Jablonecki, Kriste Nucci, Simone Sewell and Mason Thrall
Board members present via Zoom: None
There was a quorum.

Also present were Dr. Joseph Macary, Superintendent of Schools; Mr. Robert Testa, Assistant Superintendent; Mr. William Meier III, Director of Business and Finance; Mr. Brett Lacoske, Financial Analyst and Ms. Nina Prajzner, Secretary to Mr. Meier.

2.0 Call to Order

Chairperson Grabowski called the meeting to order at 6:05 p.m.

3.0 Community Forum Opportunity for Public Comment on Superintendent's Proposed 2024-2025 Budget

Michael Winkler of Vernon, CT said the town is expected to receive \$948,000 in additional state funding for fiscal year 2024-2025. He added there should be no significant impact on the Town of Vernon's mill rate. He said the Board of Education and Superintendent are doing great with the resources provided to them. He said the students of Vernon are equal to any other student in the state of Connecticut. He noted that Vernon's DRG is G. He would like to see students treated the same as students in DRG A. He feels anyone who qualifies for free lunch should also qualify for full time preschool.

4.0 Budget Workshop

Dr. Macary spoke about the \$250 per classroom elementary per school. He suggested they increase to \$300 for all 88 classrooms. He added this will increase the budget by \$4,400. Mason Thrall said this is well past due and something they should implement. Dr. Macary said this will be listed in five-line items - one per each elementary school.

Tonight's workshop began on page 97 of Maintenance.

On page 97, a question was asked about the reduction in custodial salary. Dr. Macary said this is just for temporary Summer employees and it is based on actuals. He added they hire extra custodians for cleaning over the Summer. A follow up question was asked about the temporary employees going from part time to full time. Dr. Macary said no, they are just temporary employees.

On page 98, Dr. Macary spoke about the new maintainer vehicle. He said the current vehicle is twelve years old. He noted that the vehicle is around \$70,000 new. A follow up question was asked if it was for one person or multiple. Dr. Macary said they are assigned per person.

A question was asked about the \$6,000 increase for roof repairs. Dr. Macary said it is based on actuals. A follow up question was asked about if the Center Road School roof was completed. Dr. Macary said yes, it will be addressed at the next board meeting.

On page 99, a question was asked about what School Dude is. Dr. Macary said that is the name of the program for all maintenance requests.

A question was asked about receiving grants for security systems or intercoms. Dr. Macary said they received a security grant. He added they are doing a three-year lookback to see what funds are reimbursable.

On page 100, a question was asked about replacing ceiling tiles at VCMS by schedule or due to issues. Dr. Macary said they had the roof redone but it is on a replacement schedule.

A question was asked about small hardware supply actuals in 2022 and 2023 and if the decrease was due to COVID. Dr. Macary said yes, they had more funds during COVID years for upgrades but now funds are lower.

On page 101, a question was asked about the pavement preservation program. Dr. Macary said they did not have a line item for concrete so they added one in for repairs.

A question was asked about the amount of fuel expected to be used next year. Mr. Meier said they are watching the prices but are expecting a range between \$2.50 to \$2.60. A follow up question was asked about where the vehicles fill up on gas. Mr. Meier said gas gets delivered to public works in Town and diesel goes to the bus lot which is used only for board vehicles. A follow up question was asked about buying fuel through consortium. Dr. Macary said they found better pricing.

This concludes the review of the Maintenance proposed budget.

Central Administration:

On page 107, a question was asked if this information has already been reviewed in other sections of the budget. Dr. Macary said the top half is in the personnel section.

On page 108, Dr. Macary spoke of the increase for substitute teachers. He said this is due to an increase in pay of \$130 per day.

On page 109, a question was asked about some contracts listing severance pay and some not. Dr. Macary said it depends on the bargaining unit. He added the amount is based on anticipated retirements.

On page 110, a question was asked about the \$95,000 decrease in life insurance. Mr. Meier said the contract was renewed with a better rate so they were able to cut the cost down.

A question was asked about the \$1.3 million in health insurance costs. Dr. Macary said claims are higher than projected. He added that over the last five years, they had 25-27 high cost claims per year but last year they had over 45. He said they are projecting for 45 again. He said there was about \$760,000 per month last year in claims but now there is around \$875,000.

A question was asked about the \$400,000 cut by the Town Council last year being from health insurance. Dr. Macary said last year they had alliance funding to cover the cut. He said the year before, they were cut \$250,000 which was pulled from health insurance.

A question was asked about why workers compensation claims were increasing. Dr. Macary said they increased it due to large claims being made. He added this is why they would like to fix things such as concrete to prevent injuries.

On page 111, a question was asked about the decrease in pension. Dr. Macary said they moved from a defined benefit plan to a defined contribution plan. He added there is less of an impact for employees. He said the change was made around five to six years ago and they are now starting to see the decrease.

On page 112, a question was asked about the increase of \$182,000 for Town data processing enterprise funds. Dr. Macary said they share IT services with the Town. He added that their share for next year is \$1.2 million.

On page 113, a question was asked about the current rate for employee reimbursement for travel. Dr. Macary said it is 67 cents per mile and will change January 1st of next year. He added that the rate is set by the IRS.

A question was asked about CHRO compliance. Dr. Macary said they have ongoing CHRO issues at RHS. He said there is a line item in Capital Improvements.

On page 115, a question was asked about magnet school tuition increasing with less students attending. Dr. Macary confirmed. A follow up question was asked about the amount for the increase. Dr. Macary said they are unsure of exact increase.

On page 116, a question was asked about an expected increase for homeless transportation. Dr. Macary confirmed.

A question was asked about the telephonic interpreter. Dr. Macary said they are making laws where they have to supply translation in person and over the phone. He added that Vernon already supplies this. A follow up question was asked about it including ASL. Mr. Testa confirmed.

On page 117, a question was asked about VoAg switching over to gas and if the \$22,470 reduction includes tank removal. Dr. Macary said they are going to run on gas and it is listed in another line item.

On page 118, a question was asked about the family school community partnership numbers staying the same and if they need to increase. Mr. Testa said it is just for office supplies and they use other funding sources as well.

On page 120, a question was asked about the 135% increase on Chromebooks. Dr. Macary said they used to provide Chromebooks for only grade 9 but are now funding for 6th and 9th grade.

On page 121, a question was asked if the \$66,000 increase was due to changing to a different assessment tool. Mr. Testa said yes, they changed to iReady.

On page 122, a question was asked about the reduction for contingency. Dr. Macary said last year they had four bargaining unit salaries in contingency. He added this year there is only one bargaining unit to settle.

This concludes the review of the Central Administration proposed budget.

Continuing Education:

On page 125, Dr. Macary reminded the Board that GED, ESL and citizenship programs are free but classes such as cooking charge a fee.

This concludes the review of the Continuing Education proposed budget.

Office of Pupil Services:

On page 131, a question was asked if new social workers were reflected in pupil services. Dr. Macary confirmed.

A question was asked about summer school instruction expanding. Chairperson Grabowski said it is just to maintain the program so it remains free. A follow up question was asked about adding paraprofessionals. Dr. Macary said this is separate. A follow up question was asked about this only being for special education. Dr. Macary confirmed.

On page 133, a question was asked about how parents are liking the live PPT meetings. Dr. Macary said they like them. He added they are still offering virtual meetings as well.

On page 134, Dr. Macary said talented and gifted is listed under special education as well. He added that not all districts offer this but Vernon does.

Dr. Macary said Next Step is the program where the students go to job sites and do activity-based learning. He added this program is for students with disabilities from age 18 to 22.

This concludes the review of the Office of Pupil Services proposed budget.

Revenue Estimates:

Dr. Macary said the ECS estimate is currently \$18,347,731. He said as far as Medicaid, the first \$100,000 goes to the town. He said the ten surrounding towns who participate in VoAg pay Vernon directly. He added if they are in special education, they charge additionally for paras etc. He said the money goes to the town to support the budget. He also said any increases go to the alliance grant. He added that the VCMS instructional coach, world language, two math instructors and the librarian are all in alliance funding for a total of \$828,000. He also noted that when the town gets ECS funding, they will receive the same amount listed. He said additional funding comes from alliance. He said the money they charge other towns will reimburse their costs.

This concludes the review of the Revenue Estimates.

Capital Plan:

Dr. Macary said this year they expect \$20,000 per year for CHRO updates, the auditoriums need updating and they are hoping to build an Aqualab at the High School this summer. He said stage lighting at VCMS will be around a three-year project and cost \$300,000. He said NES will get a new playground near the Miracle Field and they are having engineers look at the Central Office ramp to figure out the repairs. He said they are adding concrete repairs of \$25,000 per year and will evaluate what needs to be done. He also said there is a vehicle replacement of \$70,000 for a cargo van. He added that the current van is twelve years old and the average life expectancy is ten years.

A question was asked if any of the items listed were influenced by the ten-year plan. Dr. Macary said yes, this is what they know now so it may change. He said the Aqualab will use ASTE funding but there may be others they change. He said the auditorium maintenance will be paid for by the school use account.

A question was asked about a playground replacement schedule. Dr. Macary said yes, the Parks and Recreation Supervisor is playground certified. He said they replace the playgrounds by section. A follow up question was asked about PTO fundraising paying for this. Dr. Macary said they stopped as it was not fair to ask PTO to pay for it. He added that playgrounds do have a life expectancy. Dr. Macary said they would like to have a more adaptive swing set near Miracle Field at NES.

Dr. Macary said the LED light replacements will be for all outdoor lights. They are working on getting better numbers and doing it by section. A follow up question was asked about the expected ROI for LED. Dr. Macary said it is usually about eight years. A follow up question was asked about anything being covered under grants. Dr. Macary said LED grants are drying up. He added solar grants are gone as well.

A question was asked about a total for Capital expenditures for 2024-2025. Dr. Macary said roughly \$1.6 million for facility improvements.

This concludes the review of the Capital Plan.

Chairperson Grabowski asked if there was a consensus among Board members to reflect the \$300 change for classroom teachers. All Board members agreed.

A question was asked about supplying information to Town Council in meetings. The Board's budget hearings are posted public meetings and members of Council can attend. Dr. Macary said the budget is posted online under the Business Office. He also said he will email his PowerPoint presentation to them. He said he will change his PowerPoint to reflect the \$4,400 increase and will send it out Monday.

Dr. Macary recommended the Board vote on the budget on February 5th. He added the Monday, January 29th and Wednesday, January 31st budget workshops are cancelled. The Board agreed by consensus with Dr. Macary's recommendation.

5.0 Adjournment

Chairperson Grabowski motioned to adjourn the workshop at 7:17 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Karen Colt".

Karen Colt, Board Secretary