RIVENDELL INTERSTATE SCHOOL DISTRICT  
SPECIAL BOARD MEETING  
District Office – Orford, NH  
December 8, 2015 – 6:30 p.m.

Members Present: Marc DeBois, Michael Smyth (Orford); Mark Avery, Bruce Lyndes (Fairlee); Kathy Hooke, Jean MacDonald (Vershire); Kevin Dexter, Sarah Rinehimer (West Fairlee); Kathy Blanchard (at-large)

Members Absent: David Ricker (Orford); Grover Boutin (Fairlee)

Administration and Staff Present: Brenda Needham (Superintendent), Keri Gelenian (Head of Schools/RA Principal), Gail Keiling (Head of Elementary/SME Principal), Tammy MacQueen (WES Principal), Janet Cole (Director of Special Education), Richard Paulson (CFO), Michael Galli (RA Dean of Students)

Others Present: Cicely Richardson (JO)

6:30 Call to Order

- Moment of silence for the families of Dave Ricker and Gerry Suich.
- Review changes to agenda.
- Gelenian requests Physical Education topic be added; DeBois will add to January agenda.
- Discussion of Draft Budget: Needham notes that the draft is still $130,105 over the state mandated cap; she noted that it was frustrating and challenging to work backwards from a set amount, rather than to build the budget based on school needs. Needham stated that the draft reflected cuts to personnel, but that they had not identified specific individuals. She was hopeful that the state legislature would make revisions to the bill and programs such as Visions and the Rivendell Trails Coordinator could be added back into the budget. She noted that these programs are not considered core educational programs but are important to the schools. Essentially the 7.9% health insurance increase “ate up” the money bellow the cap amount. She advised the Board to consider whether or not to strive to meet the “bottom line”. She also stated there are a lot of moving parts within personnel: people retire or move on to new places.
- Paulson continued discussion of the Budget: Equalized pupil is down. According to Brad James Vermont’s numbers are 28311 compared to 29419 last year. The administration has essentially made four layers of cuts to the budget amounting to $300,000. In addition revenue has decreased by $120,000. At this point in time the maximum student cost is $17,053. To meet the cap an additional $251,000 would need to be cut. Dick stated that this was the “absolute worst budget” he had ever worked with. They double checked enrollment and confirmed the 283 number, which does not include tuition students.
- Gelenian inquired about the risks of going over the cap and what the penalty amounted to.
- Needham responded that the NEA had those figures [Cole later provided a document from the NEA with actual figures]. Needham continued to advise the Board to be prepared with a specific protocol regarding changes to the budget at the Annual Meeting; what to do if an individual makes a motion from the floor to increase and amend the budget.
- Gelenian strongly feels we should bring a budget that reflects our needs to the community, with the understanding there may be a penalty and let them vote it down if they want.
- Hooke noted that the penalty would only be to VT towns, but would have to be distributed 1/3 to Orford and 2/3 to Vermont towns. We would only have to pay the penalty for VT students.
- Gelenian urged the Board and community to call their representatives and Governor Shumlin.
- Dick stated that if we approved this draft of the Budget we may pay a $175,000 penalty or 2/3 of $250,000. It is possible that Vermont may change the limit, and a Board member may move to decrease the budget at the Annual Meeting.
- Blanchard warned the Board of the political climate in Orford; Orford voters are already facing an 8.5% increase due to various reasons including a mistake made by the town. This has nothing to do with the school, but will make it more difficult to pass the budget. They are “up in arms.”
- Gelenian stated that he was shocked by how few voters attend Board meetings, forums, and annual budget meetings. It is essential to get the word out and encourage people to participate.
- MacDonald suggested making the case for this draft Budget at the public forums.
- Lyndes reiterated Blanchard’s comments and concerns about unhappy Orford residents and pointed to the slim margin under which the 2015 budget was passed.
- Gelenian stressed the need to debate and express one’s opinion; it’s what makes a democracy.
- Keiling noted that we must be cautious about advertising our own agenda to the public and that it is our job to educate the community about the hard facts and let them make their own decisions based on the information.
- Gelenian was frustrated with the impact state policy is having on our school. He claimed Act 46 intended to build equity, but perhaps it is doing the opposite. Like socioeconomic communities are just going to join other similar like socioeconomic communities. Our school already strongly values equity, as is seen in the absence of a tracking model.
- Keiling returned the conversation to educating the public and suggested holding public forums on specific topics.
- Blanchard wanted to clarify that the draft budget was a new budget, not a revised 2015 budget. The draft budget is a new version, and reflects an $8,000 increase from last years. She also questioned if there was any surplus. Dick stated that there was $150,000 from the FY15 budget, and theoretically could be rolled over to next year, but it would not be wise. Blanchard stated she was comfortable bringing this budget to the public.
- Needham returned to the topic of advertising budgets. She suggested Board look at the Vermont School Board Association’s web site to see what our legal parameters are. Said we can disseminate information to the public but cannot spend taxpayers’ money to promote the budget.
- Blanchard suggesting bringing three options to the public forums: Budget A, Budget B, and Budget C; A being our ideal budget before the 300,000 cuts, B being this current draft, which is still over the cap, a 1% increase and bare bones, and C being below the cap worst case scenario. The Board agreed and administration will work on creating an option A and C.

7:30 Motion made and approved to go into Executive Session.

7:55 Out of Executive Session
- Motion made and approved to accept the Interim Superintendent Job Description as presented.
- Motion made and approved to offer the .4 Interim Superintendent position to Mike Harris.
- Motion made and approved to offer Leave of Absence (family medical) to Irene Drew.
- Marc DeBois informed the Board the Act 46 Study Grant application had been completed and needed signatures.

7:58 Motion made and approved to adjourn. Adjourn.

Recorded by:
Sarah Rinehimer
Board Member/Board Secretary