

**THETFORD TOWN SCHOOL DISTRICT**  
**Tuesday, February 27, 2018**  
**Thetford Elementary School**

**DRAFT MINUTES**

Shannon Darrah convened pre-town meeting at 7:02 p.m. The following were present: Julie Acker, Charlie Buttrey, Shannon Darrah, Scott MacPhee, Kristen Downey (arrived 7:17), School Board; Kevin Petrone, TES Principal; Melanie Elliott, OESU human resources/business office; Sandra Stanley, Interim OESU Superintendent

**PUBLIC PRESENT:** Mark McMahon, Stuart Rogers, Sarah Martel, Thomas Darrah, Beth McGee, Faith Alexandre, Charles Goldensher, Don Longwell, Nate Hill, Tara Durkee

**Present from TA:** Bill Bugg, Head of School; Linda Lanteigne-Magoon, Peter Boyd, TA Board

Darrah presented the FY2019 budget. Total expenditures are up 2.1% (\$9,003,227) resulting in an estimated tax rate increase of 4.6%, based on current information from the state. The education spending calculations could change, but probably not for FY19. Most of TTSD's expenditures go to secondary education, followed by elementary education. Special education expenses increase each year. Most of the revenue is received from state funds (from our taxes) and special education reimbursement. TES reductions include one para-educator, one classroom teacher, the librarian moving from full time to 0.8, Spanish moving from 0.8 to 0.6, and restructuring of the para educators' time. TES spending increases include: An increase in pre-K tuition due to increased enrollment; an increase in special education service plans; an increase in debt service from deficits in FY15 and FY17 (\$200,989).

Question from the public: what is TTSD's obligation for pre-K? Petrone answered TTSD must pay for 10 hours of preschool for 4 and 5 year olds at an accredited program. This costs roughly \$2,000 per child and is currently provided for 40 kids.

**FY17 budget deficit summary:** In 2016 a separate article was approved to pay back a FY2015 deficit over 3 years, per state mandate. FY15's last payment will be paid off in FY19. In 2016-17 an anticipated surplus was actually a \$171,961 deficit, which needs to be repaid over 3 years. The FY17 deficit resulted from more TA students than anticipated, additional secondary and elementary special education costs, and pre-K tuition over budget (this was the first year of the pre-K program and it was difficult to estimate student enrollment).

**Support staff and special education:** In the current year paras perform 50% of their work with special education students and 50% with regular education students. Next year some paras will move to 80% special education and 20% regular education, and a few will spend 100% time in special education. This shift causes more special costs but also more special education revenues TTSD would not receive with the 50/50 model. There are more special education services in the

upcoming school year that qualify as extraordinary. Stanley explained students qualify if their expenses exceed \$50,000. The first \$50,000 is eligible for 50% reimbursement. 90% of the amount over \$50,000 is reimbursed.

**Class configurations:** Multiage classrooms have been working well in the primary wing and are expanding into the upper wing next year. 21 incoming kindergartners are expected. There will be a total of 11 classrooms: 2 Kindergarten; 3 1<sup>st</sup>/2<sup>nd</sup> multi-age; 3 3<sup>rd</sup>/4<sup>th</sup> multi-age; 1 5<sup>th</sup> grade; 2 6<sup>th</sup> grades. Petrone stated the benefits of multi-age classrooms are differentiated instruction based on what kids are ready for and socializing between ages. Projected enrollment is 186, which may increase as more Kindergartners enroll.

There will be \$120,680 less in secondary education spending due to fewer Thetford students attending TA next year.

Tax formula definitions were reviewed. For equalized pupil count, students are weighted in different ways by the Agency of Education. There are differences between a pre-K and high school student. The equivalent yield will not be finalized until June. Discussion followed. This means the tax rate won't be set until then. The town is voting on the budget, not the tax rate. Thetford's CLA went down this year. Darrah asked the town if the CLA should be appealed. After looking at house sale records, the town advised not to appeal. Peter Boyd asked, what is the definition of education spending? Discussion followed.

**Projected tax rate on a budget of \$9,003,227:** The projected local homestead rate is 4.6% higher than last year. TTSD is in the upper 15% for equalized pupil spending across the State. Tax increases were compared across home values. Buttrey reviewed income sensitivity. Typically a household income of up to \$95,000 qualifies to some extent.

**Act 46 update:** On March 14 some Board members are meeting with Secretary Holcombe to discuss SU placement. TTSD will be placed either in the White River Valley SU with Sharon, Strafford, S. Royalton, Chelsea, etc....or in the re-configured OESU. There are pros and cons of either placement. It is unclear which is the best option. TTSD has had recent discussions with Norwich regarding partnership opportunities for education and professional development. The State cannot change TTSD's governance structure from K-6 and designating 7-12 to TA. Only the town can change the governance structure. No other district has a similar structure.

Question from the public: Will TTSD be financially penalized for not merging? Darrah is not aware that TTSD will be assessed a financial penalty for not merging because there is no opportunity for merging. TTSD is structurally isolated. Buttrey listed the numerous districts TTSD approached. TTSD cannot access any tax incentives for merging. The incentives have expired. These incentives were partly to offset initial costs of merging.

Question from the public: What about bringing pre-K in house? Buttrey stated there is space in TES for pre-K. Even if TTSD offers pre-K, a parent can opt out and TTSD still has to pay for 10 hours at a different school. There is no income sensitivity for reimbursement. There was a public

comment that offering a TTSD preschool program could undermine the excellent local preschools. Acker added that the application to the State takes into account existing local programs. It would be a financial undertaking to start an in house program and there is no guarantee that students will come. Stanley added there is some work happening in Montpelier regarding pre-K funding.

Question from the public about vocational education spending as listed on the expenditure summary. Discussion followed regarding how vocational education is accounted for on the budget sheet.

Faith Alexandre asked for the TA budget. The public likes to know what TA is doing. Bugg responded the proposed budget is posted on the TA website under the Community and Board of Trustees tabs. Alexandre asked, what is the strategy for holding the line on tuition spending, especially as TA is trying to attract students from other towns? Bugg stated that over the last five years tuition has increased very little. This year is a larger increase. TA has already cut more than \$400,000 from their budget, including reductions in personnel. There are declines in enrollment statewide. Projected enrollment for next year is 310, as compared with 338 a year ago and 318 this year. Peter Boyd asked why TA data is not in the TTSD report. Acker replied that the TTSD Board opted to let TA communicate their budget to the public. TA's information can be added to the town meeting presentation. Buttrey suggested that Bugg talk about recruiting efforts. TA has hosted 23 Chelsea students. A member of the public commented that Chelsea kids have to drive through Rivendell to get to TA. Peter Boyd explained that announced tuition is not the same as the cost per student. TA's tuition is based on total expenditures divided by the number of students. There are only a few expenses covered by the endowment. At TA the cost per student is actually very close to the announced tuition. Comparing TA to local union high schools, TA is spending much less. The tuition rates published in the paper are misleading.

Sarah Martel remarked that the Board can control so little in their budget. TTSD is trying to manipulate a very small amount within a large budget.

Beth McGee recalled a slide she has seen in the past illustrating the trend of decreasing enrollment. She suggested the Board emphasize this issue is not unique to Thetford, it is statewide.

**ADJOURNMENT:** 8:05 p.m.

**FUTURE MEETINGS:**

3/6/18 OESU Meeting - Oxbow High School	6:00 p.m.
3/6/18 Thetford School District Meeting - Oxbow High School	7:15 p.m.
3/13/18 Thetford School District Meeting	6:30 p.m.

RESPECTFULLY SUBMITTED,

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Amy Bosco, Minutes Clerk

*These minutes are not official until approved by the School Board.*