

TOWN OF WISCASSET
BUDGET COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES
March 19, 2008

The meeting was called to order by Chair Steve Mehrl at 6:35 PM at the Wiscasset Municipal Building.

Budget committee Members in attendance: Chairman Steve Mehrl, Judith Colby, Sherri Dunbar, Pamela Dunning, Robert Fairfield Sr, George Greene, Richard Hanson and. Tony True. Member absent was Karl Tarbox.

There was a brief look at the calendar Steve provided to be sure everyone had the dates for meetings.

There was an extended discussion about the articles for the open town meeting as pertain to the school budget. There is some question as to whether the Budget Committee will be able to add an article with a dollar amount or if they will just have a line as to recommend or not recommend. There is also some question as to whether the Committee may add an article to the secret ballot that would offer an alternative dollar amount to that which is discussed at open town meeting. At this point, it was decided that the Budget Committee needs guidance from town officials as to how the process will work.

There was a suggestion that the Budget Committee could hold an informational meeting on Saturday April 26 to address the Town Ballot articles. That would allow more of the public to come in and ask questions after the Selectmen's Public Hearing on April 15. That will allow those who could not attend on a Tuesday night a chance to hear how the budget was decided.

There was a discussion about Essential Programs and Services (EPS) and how it was developed. Each year the schools send their MEA results to the state. The state finds the top 10 schools in testing and looks at how they achieved their results. From this information, the state works up a model of what is essential in a school system in order to educate children. EPS is based on that model. A document titled ED281 is sent to each school that lists the services and programs that the state deems essential to that school. The state pays a share of those programs and services and the local population pays the rest through taxation. Any personnel that are hired or programs that are purchased over EPS is paid for by the local population through taxation.

The Budget Committee does not yet have copies of ED 281 for this year. One member had a copy from last year. The document was inspected and there was some discussion about how to read and understand the information.

There was some discussion about the price of \$10 million to close a school and bring the other 2 schools to code. There was some confusion about the need to repair shower stalls in the locker rooms since one member believed that the students were not allowed to take

showers after gym class. The reason stated that there was not enough time to shower and make it back to class.

There was some discussion about complaints that had been voiced to several members that the school lunches were "Gross." The servings are small, unappetizing and have little nutritional value. It was also stated that the kitchens only microwave products and do not actually cook.

There was a discussion about the levels of cuts being recommended by the department heads. There were questions as to why the schools need 2 Athletic Directors. There was more discussion as to whether the teachers' time is being utilized efficiently. The first list of cuts added up to \$553,589 by level 4. The list was reorganized and the cuts changed to \$461,707. The list was done a third time and now adds up to \$322,424 by level 4 with the school board looking to cut only to level 3.

The question was raised as to whether anyone had an idea of other cuts that should be made. One suggestion was to cut to EPS and no more. Cutting to EPS would not necessarily make the schools offer only those things listed on EPS. The school administration would still have discretion over the budget to spend it how they see fit. Also, union contracts would determine which personnel would remain and which would go. Another suggestion for cuts was to take the \$553,589 that the administrators first said they could do without and take the \$207,000 contingency fund for retroactive pay raises. A third suggestion was to cut the \$553,589, cut the contingency fund, and cut the \$300,000 amount of carry forward from this year.

It was stated that the school policy on carry forward states that it is to be returned to the town for tax relief. This does not happen in that way. The money is used the next year by the school to offset the amount to be raised. This accomplishes the same thing in a different way.

There was some discussion that Wiscasset may decide to opt out of the reorganization of school unions. The penalty for opting out would be 1% of the states share of EPS. It was spoken of that the towns to build the new union are backing out because our budget is too high.

Some members asked if it would be more economical to close the high school and offer our children the options of tuition to other towns' high schools.

It was discussed that the talks kept working themselves from budget matters and that it might be a good idea to all offer items for discussion for the next meeting. Each member will send Steve a list of topics and he will organize the list as to order of importance and write the agenda to reflect that.

Selectman Duane Goud joined the discussion at this point and was asked questions about the open town meeting and the secret ballot vote. Duane was not sure of the specifics but did discuss the topics with the committee. It was decided that the Selectmen and the

Budget Committee should talk to Town Clerk Sandra Johnson and find out how the process will work.

There was some discussion about what a no vote would accomplish on the school budget secret ballot question. If the question is voted down, does that give the school the amount set in EPS or does it give the school nothing at all. The way the question is written leaves interpretation open to a degree. The town needs clarification as to what the no vote accomplishes and where the Budget Committee can offer an alternate amount.

Having no further business, Sherri Dunbar made the motion to close the meeting. Motion was seconded by Tony True. Motion passed 7-0. Meeting closed at 9:13 PM.

Respectfully submitted by Pamela Dunning.