



## FINANCE COMMITTEE MINUTES

March 26, 2014

7:30 p.m.

Webinar

Valley Independent Sentinel

158 Main Street, Suite 305

Ansonia, CT 06401

Board Members in Attendance: Kristen Harmeling, Committee Chairman  
Jennifer Magri  
Yashu Putorti

Others Present: Rick Belden, Assistant Superintendent, Finance & Operations  
Ethan Fry, Valley Independent Sentinel  
Eugene Driscoll, Valley Independent Sentinel

### I. CALL TO ORDER

A. Ms. Harmeling called meeting to order with introductions of the Board members and other participants in attendance at 7:00 p.m. Mr. Driscoll welcomed the public to the webinar.

### II. REPORTS AND INFORMATION

#### A. Information

##### 1. 2014-2015 Board of Education Budget Presentation

Ms. Harmeling did an overview of the 2014-2015 budget presentation.

### III. OPEN DISCUSSION

#### A. Open Discussion on Issues Pertaining to School Budget

Questions from the chat room:

1. **Aggie:** **Were there any cuts made in the current budget to help save money?**  
From last year we tried to save money on items like professional services. As part of the process of getting to the revised budget this year, there were reallocated costs and some cuts such as the central office clerical paraprofessional, clerical paraprofessional at High School, and not replacing retiring teachers.
2. **Mort Conlan:** **What is the impact to our system with the BOF proposed budget? Why was the vote taken so early in the process?**  
We met as a Board and attempted to make the proposed number work and that revised budget is what is being presented tonight. Mr. Putorti talked about the changes impacting the plan to hire a content area coordinator position which has now been changed to regular teaching positions. Mr. Belden talked about the healthcare costs and said the insurance broker did a great job and the rate was decreased by 4%. This year's BOF made the decision to trim our budget in the beginning of the process with the hope that the budget referendum passes on the first time. This is different from what was done in past years.

3. **Bob:** **Since mandates seem to have an ongoing impact to the budget each year; how can the public help the school district in advocating for or against certain legislation? How would one even know what is being proposed?**  
Ms. Harmeling talked about CAFE and how they help us stay abreast of legislative issues but there is not a really good system of knowing what legislation is out there. She recommended starting with local representatives. Board members have approached our local representatives and asked them to slow down and allow superintendents to solve the problems before writing legislation mandates. She cited one example which is the state's proposal of one common school calendar saying someone felt doing this would save money. While it may work in some areas of the state, it does not work in Seymour and does not save us any money. Already coordinate with regard to vocational schools. Loss of local control, we are watching this one from a financial point of view as well as a community point of view. We need to argue for the money to implement these mandates.
4. **Tim Herrick:** **Given the adoption of more technology, what steps are being taken to reduce paper waste?**  
Kristen Harmeling said this was a very good question and has been discussed by Board members. The use of technology has not impacted textbooks for an example. This may never eliminate textbooks. There may not be much savings with regard to textbooks. However from the administrative side, we are encouraging teachers to not print emails, etc. and to really think before they print and/or make copies. We have realized a decrease in the use of paper. The Board went paperless with their agendas thus saving the cost of paper and the delivery costs associated with those agendas. Mr. Belden said we are always looking for ways to reduce the use of paper such as proposing the elimination of paper pay stubs.
5. **Tim:** **What steps are being taken to protect the privacy of the students using Chromebooks?**  
We take privacy very seriously. We have a very secure firewall and the kids are not out on the world wide web, they are signing in through the school servers. They are within our school system. We have taken many steps to make our school servers secure. We will follow up with you regarding this question after we consult with our Technology Coordinator.
6. **Bob:** **Is there an opportunity to change the budget again at the public hearing?**  
Yes, there is an opportunity to change the budget again but it has to be approved by at least 50 people at a meeting and have a majority vote. The town budget hearing is a critical part of our budget process. The annual town budget meeting is happening on April 3, 2014 at 7:00 in Seymour Middle School
7. **Mort:** **Will this webinar be available for viewing after this broadcast?**  
Mr. Driscoll said yes it will be available on the Valley Independent website.
8. **Bob:** **How much will my taxes increase if I support the budget?**  
At the last BOF meeting the number that was given to us was \$115-\$116 annual increase for the average homeowner. We will confirm and get this information on the website.

9. Eugene: **How many union contracts have been negotiated and who is getting raises and how much?**  
 Our contract cycle is three years. Teachers are in the 1<sup>st</sup> year. The salary increases for this three year cycle is 2.89%, 2.99%, and 2.99% but that does not equate to what each teacher is getting. We have steps with regard to increases. Administrators have the same numbers for increases but do not have steps. The negotiated contracts included significant savings with new health care contract which include High Deductible Plans and Health Savings Accounts. We are currently in negotiations with secretaries and custodians.
10. Jessica: **Some towns present one combined town/education budget, would that be beneficial to Seymour in terms of getting it passed sooner?**  
 Ms. Harmeling said she absolutely thinks it would stop the "us/they" mentality (those who have kids in school vs. those who don't). To change this, it would take a charter change and a vote. There is talk of doing this and it would be extremely beneficial to the process.
11. Eugene: **For elections, who do you need to target to effect change?**  
 Ms. Harmeling said we need to target those people who didn't call in today, those who stay home on voting day because they feel it doesn't matter because the schools will open anyway, which is true. We can make it work but what will it look like? It will look like 30 kids in a middle school class. We encourage everyone to vote, the turnout is so low every referendum. We would like to see each household bring their spouse or significant other to vote. You do not need to be a registered voter to vote on the budget. You need only to own property of \$1000. You can vote with proper identification and confirmation that you are on the list of property owners within the Town of Seymour
- Mr. Driscoll thanked everyone for participating in the webinar.

IV. **ADJOURNMENT**

(Mr. Putorti/sec., Ms. Harmeling) to adjourn the meeting

**SO VOTED**

**AFFIRMATIVE:** Mr. Putorti, Ms. Harmeling

The meeting adjourned at 8:35 p.m.

Submitted by:  
 Lee-Ann Dauerty  
 Board Clerk