



**TOWN COUNCIL
MEETING MINUTES
JUNE 30, 2009**

Michael Bowie, Chair At Large 2009
Gina Mason, Vice Chair District 1 2010
Fern Laroche, Jr., At Large 2010
Roger Cote, At Large 2011
Janet Henry, District 1 2009
Dale Crafts, District 2 2010
Norma Wells, District 2 2009

CALL TO ORDER & PLEDGE TO THE FLAG. The Chairman, Michael Bowie, called the meeting to order and led the pledge of allegiance to the flag at 7:00 PM.

ROLL CALL. Members present were Councilors Wells, Bowie, Mason, Crafts, Henry, Laroche and Cote. Also present were Stephen Eldridge, Town Manager; Rick Green, School Superintendent; Prudence Grant, School Committee Chair; Traci Austin, School Committee Member; Robin Tupper, School Committee Member; Jeff Ganong, Budget Advisory Board Chair; Richard Main, Budget Advisory Board Member; Donald Fellows, Budget Advisory Board Member; Lori Pomelow, Budget Advisory Board Member; and approximately 25 citizens in the audience.

COUNCIL ORDERS, RESOLUTIONS & ORDINANCES

ADOPT 2009-2010 SCHOOL BUDGET

Prudence Grant said the School Committee voted a week ago on Monday night on a vote of 4 to 1 to come back to the Council with the same budget that had been rejected. Because we and you really want the new construction project at the Lisbon High School completed to help us with the NEASC accreditation process. There is one major change I believe you will appreciate. We have not yet settled negotiations with the LEA but they have declared impasse and will be filing for mediation. That mediation won't occur until the fall. At issue is just language so without violating confidentiality I want you to know that the School Committee is going to transfer to operations and maintenance the sum of \$107,940, which is the amount in the budget for teacher salary increases.

Traci Austin said the School Committee is dedicated to finding funds for NEASC improvements. She said they have set aside \$104,508 from curtailment funds from November, \$59,682 from not replacing a guidance councilor, \$26,938 from not filling a teaching position at LCS, \$25,200 from the failed bond interest payment, \$1,000 gift from the class of 2009, \$19,878 from the reduction in superintendent's salary and administration, and \$107,940 from the teacher's salaries totaling approximately \$430,000. We just wanted to show you that we have diverted some money out of our budget as well. Although this all doesn't go towards the construction projects, it will go towards NEASC improvements like installing gas for the classrooms, furniture for the 5th science lab, and so forth. Councilor Laroche said all for improvements. Mrs. Austin said, absolutely.

Councilor Bowie said the Budget Advisory Board members are present and I would like to ask them if they have any advice or comments as representatives of the town's Budget Advisory Board.

Jeff Ganong said the Budget Advisory Board had a couple of thoughts regarding this budget. First, we were in favor of the first budget and it's unfortunate that the voters rejected it. Several board members said they heard comments and concerns about the accreditation of the school and the potential of losing that seems to be getting a lot of feedback. The Budget Advisory Board feels that we can't go back to the town with the same dollar amount. We recommend the school budget be cut by \$109,000, which would be teacher's salaries increases from the personnel line.

Councilor Larochelle said knowing now that the \$109,000 would come out of the improvements for the school, does the Budget Advisory Board still feel that would still be the best recommendation. Mr. Ganong said, yeah, or the biggest reason was because some of us feel that the budget could have been passed if the original budget was lower. We feel since the voters did reject it that and indicated that they wanted it to go down that there is a responsibility to lower the budget.

Councilor Bowie said I will open up deliberations from the Council. Councilor Crafts said since the public has spoken I would like to see the \$107,940 also go towards repairing the school building, but I also believe the public said they wanted a school budget with less money. I don't know if there is anyway of doing both, but I would go along with their recommendation if somehow the \$107,940 could go out to the public for voter approval to go towards the improvements because I would like to see the money go there also. The public has spoken and we need to represent the public. This is a tough situation to be in. If it can't be done that way, then we ought to take the Budget Advisory Board's recommendation and represent the voters.

Councilor Larochelle said someone I respect quite a bit spoke to me about this. They had been keeping up with this and said I was kind of concerned when I voted on the school budget and I voted no because it didn't tell me how much my taxes would go up. He asked me if I approve it how much will my taxes go up. I reassured him that our main goal was to not raise taxes this year with reduced revenues it would remain flat, even with reduced revenues on the town and school side. This person said if I would have known it wouldn't have raised my taxes, because I am not getting a raise this year and I have no more money, so if taxes don't go up that would be a blessing. The people I spoke to who I know who went in to vote because they were concerned about their taxes going up and they just saw that large number and they didn't know whether this would make their taxes go up a lot, a little, or none at all. I think we still have a very uninformed public. I asked him if he had known going in that it would not have raised his taxes what would you have done. He answered and said I don't care what you do as long as you don't raise my taxes as long as you are doing it correctly. I think as a Council we set a goal for the school and municipal side to do whatever you want but don't raise taxes. The school initially came through with a budget that didn't raise taxes. We put a vote out there, which was a little confusing for people for a bond to improve the school and that fell short so they were stuck with a school that needed repairs with no money. They went back and still squeezed out another \$400,000, which I didn't realize how hard it was to find \$400,000 and sometimes we beat ourselves up over smaller amounts, but I would hate to think that we cut basically for the principle of cutting \$100,000 knowing that it's going to come out of the addition to the high school just because. I hope if we can inform people that we are approving the right amount. Unfortunately, if we were to cut that \$100,000 out of the school budget, again, no one is going to see a difference in their tax bill, but yet on the other hand we may not have enough money to do our improvements and we may have to go out to bond so we may be borrowing money instead of using money that we have, which really doesn't make a lot of sense. It's really hard for the town to tell us to pay as you go if they say you can't have the money to fix it as you go but it's in your budget and it's not going to raise taxes. So if you can raise the money without going out to bond, isn't it crazy to go any other direction. The number we take off tonight is how much further they lose to actually do the repairs to the school. \$100,000 will fix a lot of problems. This would send a strong message this fall to NEASC that we are finding funds within our own budget to fix things. I agree with the Budget Advisory Board that people have spoken and they said it was too high, but the extra money isn't going to people's raises; unfortunately we don't have control over that, but we do have control over using money we already have or over what we are going to be budgeting without raising taxes to repair what we have. I would like to go back with the original amount because anything we take away from it is just money we have to find. If this was going to drop people's taxes then I would say go back and vote, your taxes are going to go down \$50, but to cut \$109,000, which is not going to reduce anyone's taxes, but yet it does not give us any money to fix the school either.

Councilor Wells said I understand where they are going and it's a great direction. When we asked for the amount of the salary decreases to the budget and \$107,940 was for teacher's wages, \$40,439

was for support staff, and \$7,441 was for administration for a total of \$155,820. I'm having a problem with \$47,880 because the numbers don't add up. Part of me would like to say I am in total agreement with this, but I also want that additional \$47,880 moved into that same line. We asked everyone to hold to a zero wage increase and I see administration is getting a 1% increase and support staff is getting I'm not sure what and the teachers so I would have felt better if the whole amount had been moved, but I'm having a problem with the numbers not adding up. I want \$47,000 more to go towards that school building project budget. Why are we only discussing one third of the amount we were told was budgeted for wage increases.

Mrs. Grant said LEA asked the support staff, represented by the same bargaining unit, and their contract is in the last year of a three year contract and they said they would not open it to reduce salaries, which they don't have to do.

Mr. Green said the administrators are still willing to do that, but the agreement was that if the teachers did it then we would do it. Councilor Wells said I don't mean this disrespectful, but sometimes you need to set an example starting with the administrators setting the example first. I understand your statement, but by you setting an example can sometimes move everybody else in that same direction. Mr. Green said they have said, no, with the teacher contract not being settled yet. The administrators are all on vacation and whatever, so we have not had a chance to sit down with them to find out the answer to your question, but initially that's what they agreed to. Councilor Wells said you could end up with teachers taking a wage freeze, administrators taking a wage freeze, and not the support staff. Mr. Green said, yes. Councilor Wells said that's great for morale.

Councilor Mason said the consolidated board of Councilors, School Committee members and citizens are working on the conditions for NEASC improvements. Have they come up with a figure yet on what that's going to be? Mrs. Austin said currently the rough idea is being looked over by an engineer who was called in as a favor to review it to make sure we had included everything. Next we plan to hire a professional architect approved by the state, which did not come through so he now is passing it along to someone he knows that will get the work done. Councilor Mason said do we have a ballpark figure yet. Mrs. Austin said he is afraid to ballpark it because of the elevation issues and code regulations involved so he would not even suggest an amount in case something had been missed. I don't want to put myself out there and then it winds up being \$200,000 more. That would look awful on our part when we know we are not ready to give out that figure. Councilor Mason said that's my point, what if it ends up being more than we are going to allocate here tonight anyway. We will end up having to bond or find the money some place else. Mrs. Austin said the less money we have to bond the better. Councilor Mason said but it may end up effecting taxes some where down the line, correct. Mrs. Austin said that's possible but not the intention. Councilor Mason said but it could happen. Mrs. Austin said, absolutely.

Councilor Cote said I look at this issue a little differently than most of you. We sent this to the voters and the voters sent an opinion on what they wanted the Council to do. Now the voters have voted and they came back with the budget was too high, they wanted it lowered and this Council is going to sit here now and say, well you told us you wanted it lower but we really don't care because we think that we know better than you do. I think that's a direct slap in the face to the voters of this town. We have been told in the past that we were going to sell the old schools, but it never happened. The voters in town resent that kind of action. I think they have sent a very clear message that they felt the school budget was too high and they wanted it lowered and it's our duty as people who represent the voters to fulfill their wishes and lower the school budget and send it back to them for a vote. I believe the figure we should go with is \$155,820. It's the right thing to do here.

Council Henry said I agree with Councilor Larochelle that a lot of people were misinformed. I didn't go out and get what I usually get for absentee voters. I think voter apathy was that it was going to pass no matter what. It didn't and I think it's unfortunate. The people voted in on the School Committee today were instructed to take care of their budget and I think they have done a

good job about it. I am willing to send it back to the voter as is because I think it will be a very different vote this time. I understand there were even 40 people within the school system that live in town who never voted. I don't think we publicized it enough. We need to do a much better job of getting this out there.

Councilor Crafts said they already spoke twice about this so I can't go along without cutting the school budget unless the public understands that we could take that \$107,000 to go towards repairing the building, if the public wants that. If we can't present it to the public that way, then I have to be on the side of cutting it. If this goes back to the public with the same amount I think you will have people come out in protest about it.

Councilor Cote said we have always been told that all we can do is cut the bottom line and they are going to do what they want with it. When we tried to cut the budget in the past after we voted they went ahead and bought trucks, fixed schools, and did what they wanted to do regardless of what we had thought or said. It didn't matter. All we could cut was the bottom line. After years of this type of thing, I think, it's pretty clear that the decisions we make on this bottom line vote is the decision that we have to make to represent our taxpayers.

Councilor Bowie said I'm not 100% sold that the money has to come out of the NEASC upgrades. There has been talk in the past about administrative consolidation, right. We talked about the town potentially doing payroll. Maybe the town could house some of the administrative offices, right? Maybe some of the other administrative support staff or whatever can move back to the different schools. Maybe we could then sell LES and use that money to improve some stuff. We could not replace any open positions. We could potentially have the principals take over some of the co-curricular stuff for the year based upon recent moves this year. I know none of this sounds ideal, but there are other areas that could be looked at if a cut has to be made. You could look at where we exceed the EPS formula and can there be some additional cuts made in those areas to bring it more in line with the EPS formula, which would allow you not to have to touch any of the NEASC upgrades or improvements. If the Council wishes to not send the same budget back and to make a cut I don't think it has to come from the NEASC stuff, which is related to the accreditation piece. There are other opportunities to get some, for lack of a better word, dribs and drabs of funds in reductions to do that. As I pointed out, we can't dictate that. We can only recommend those types of things with whatever cut is elected to be made. I don't think it all has to be directly off the top of the accreditation improvements.

Councilor Cote said in past when cuts had to be made they always seemed to bring out things that seemed to be the nearest and dearest to the hearts of the people. That's been clearly done, again. I am not going to shoot down the importance of what they are trying to do, but they always seem to find the things that are nearest and dearest to the people. The bottom line is we have to in these hard times start looking out for our constituents and the ones who are having a hard time with paying their taxes.

Councilor Bowie said where is the Council at. I am torn. I can send the budget back or I can go along with a cut. Councilor Cote said are you looking for a motion. Councilor Bowie said we have to have a motion and a second in order to vote on anything.

VOTE (2009-98A) Councilor Cote, seconded by Councilor Crafts moved to send the budget back to the people with \$155,820 less for a total of \$14,172,080.00 and let the voters decide whether they want to keep that. **Vote By Roll Call - Yeas: Councilors Cote, Crafts, and Mason. Nays: Councilors Bowie, Henry, Larochelle, and Wells. Order Failed - Vote 3-4.**

Councilor Wells said Councilor Bowie I don't disagree with anything you said in regards to the fact that we have thrown out many suggestions to them over this budget season on ways to make cuts. We also talked about consolidating administrative support services. We talked about offering them

space here in this building. You're right; I can not agree that we would make cuts that would affect that building process, because I think there are ways they can make cuts. I have a hard time doing \$155,820 only because \$47,880 of that is not agreed upon. There is a possibility that, yes, if we cut something from that bottom line they are going to cut a few positions out as Councilor Cote said, that have been hot items. I know from having sat on the School Committee before that those are not easy decisions. You want the best programs you can afford for your kids, but you don't always get to give them everything that you wish you could give them so I would like to make a motion.

VOTE (2009-98B) Councilor Wells, seconded by Councilor Crafts moved to send the budget back to the voter with \$115,381 less for a total of \$14,212,519. **Vote By Roll Call - Yeas: Councilors Bowie, Cote, Crafts, Mason and Wells. Nays: Councilors Henry and Larochelle. Order Passed - Vote 5-2.**

WARRANT FOR JULY 14, 2009
SCHOOL BUDGET VALIDATION REFERENDUM

Councilor Bowie said we need to hold the school budget validation referendum within 14 days. We are looking to do everything we did before, which would be to set the polling hours from 11AM to 7PM and make the polling place for Ward-1 at the Town Office and Ward-2 at MTM, and to have absentee ballots available as soon as available and processed on Election Day at 2PM, 4PM and 7PM, and to hold voter registration hours on July 13 from 8:30AM to 4:30 PM at the Town Clerk's Office and on Election Day from 11AM to 7PM at the polling locations.

Councilor Cote said he heard comments from people who said, at the last election, shoot the polls are closed. People are very busy. Could we delay it one hour in the morning and close one hour later? For Special Elections it's real easy to come home after 7PM. Councilor Bowie said I wouldn't suggest delaying it an hour because I know people a lot of people try to get there during lunch. So what I think I'm hearing is to open at 11AM and close at 8PM. Councilor Cote said I think the voters will appreciate that. Councilor Crafts said I'll go along with that. That's just what I was going to suggest. Councilor Bowie said that's fine.

John Wierzbicki said I have one quick point. A lot of people are here for the Moxie Festival so if you held it possibly the week before it would be better attended. Councilor Bowie said we can't get everything done in time to support that.

Dorothy Fitzgerald said I heard complaints that the polls were not open long enough and that they should be open earlier in the morning than 11AM, say 9AM. I heard complaints that they were not open early enough. Councilor Mason said Mrs. Lycette what kind of traffic do you see in the morning. Mrs. Lycette said we used to always open at 9AM for years, but I am not thinking that you will get a large turnout between 9AM and 11AM. Councilor Crafts said our complaint is that we don't have enough people out voting. Obviously if you open longer you are going to get more because someone is going to be driving down School Street and see the sign and pull in to vote. If someone is going down School Street and they have time to vote and they pull in and they are not open yet and that might be their only opportunity to pull in and vote. I would like to open as early as we can and stay open as late as we can. This is a lot of taxpayer's dollars. Councilor Wells said why not do what we do for a Presidential Election and extend the time from 7AM to 8PM. At the last election I voted on my way to work and there was a line. Mrs. Lycette said you would get the same amount between 9AM and 11AM, but if you open at 7AM you will get the before work crowd. Councilor Crafts said if we get ten extra voters it will be worth the extra money.

VOTE (2009-99) Councilor Wells, seconded by Councilor Crafts moved to adopt the warrant presented changing the polling hours from 7AM to 8PM. **Order passed - Vote 7-0.**

ADJOURNMENT

VOTE (2009-100) Councilor Cote, seconded by Councilor Crafts moved to adjourn at 7:42 PM
Order passed - Vote 7-0.

Respectfully Submitted,

Twila D. Lycette, Council Secretary
Town Clerk, Lifetime CCM

Cassette tapes are filed in the Town Clerk's Office.