

Oyster River Cooperative School District

FY25 Public Budget Hearing

January 10, 2024 7:00 pm

School Board Members: Denise Day, Dan Klein, Tom Newkirk, Brian Cisneros, Giana Gelsey, Heather Smith, Matt Bacon

Administration Present: Catherine Plourde, Josh Olstad, Lisa Huppe, Gen Brown, Misty Lowe, David Goldsmith, Bill Sullivan, Rebecca Noe

There was 1 member of the public present.

Chair Denise Day started the meeting at 7:00 pm.

Brian Cisneros made a motion to open the public hearing, 2nd by Tom Newkirk. Motion passed 7-0.

Dr. Morse announced it was his last public hearing presentation and that it's been an honor serving the district. To view the slideshow, [click here](#).

District Highlights

SAT & Graduation

One of the standards used to determine how the district is doing is the SAT score. Oyster River's aggregate score of 1119 is one of the highest in the state. In fact, 61% of students met or exceeded in math, a notable amount compared to the 35% state average. In a 2018-2023 SAT score comparison, Oyster River exceeds the state and national performance in both reading/writing and math.

The district's college placement rate is 83%, which includes 4-year, 2-year, and technical programs. Upon graduation, 19% of students choose military or work. Oyster River's 99% high school graduation rate remains one of the highest in the state. Dr. Morse credited the commitment of the school board, administration, and teachers in providing programming in which every child can be successful.

STAR Reading & Math

The elementary and middle school STAR Reading & Math scores are higher now than pre-COVID. The scores were adversely affected during the pandemic, but they have recovered more robustly thanks to the hard work of staff and students. Dr. Morse thanked teachers, support staff, and administrators for bringing the district back to academic excellence.

Enrollment

Enrollment remains in a stabilized place in terms of projections and building capacity. Twelve years ago, Moharimet was overcrowded, but today both elementary schools are at a perfect size for administrators to know every child and for teachers to focus on individual needs. There are 185 tuition students, mostly from Barrington, that bring the district 3.5 million dollars. This funding helps deliver a robust academic program and it has a positive effect on the tax rate for the community.

FY 25 Key Points

School Board Budget Goals

The final total of all the warrants for the FY25 budget reached a sum that would result in a 6.19% increase from the approved 2023-24 budget. However, the board looked at revenue and reserve accounts to offset the amount. They created three increase options that range from low to high: 3.60%, 4.00%, 4.32%. After discussing what they would lose at each rate, the board identified cuts and new revenues in order to keep all the warrant articles and still bring the percentage down to 4.17%.

FY25 Increases

Several major drivers/expenditures figured into the FY25 increases. The most unexpected and significant was the one million dollar increase in health insurance. A few others include the last ORMS bond payment, guild agreements, and an increase in utilities costs. The board also identified two positions of need, a strings teacher and mental health counselor. The strings program has grown substantially over the years and the current ratio is 1 teacher for 260 students in grades 5-12. The mental and social health of kids has risen beyond the abilities of counselors who are not trained in mental health. Dr. Morse said the state has seen a considerable increase in referrals and services are stretched, so more and more schools are taking on this responsibility.

Additional Revenue

Retirement incentives offered by the board have helped lower the budget costs, as well as revenue identified from tuition, interest, trust funds, and the retained fund balance to name a few. Dr. Morse credited the board for weighing the needs of students and taxpayers, stating they are cognizant of keeping a balance in mind.

Proposed Budget & Default Budget

The total proposed budget for the FY25 is \$56,248,037. If this budget is not passed, the default budget will automatically be \$55,929,305.

Warrant Articles

Warrant article #4 includes the Tutor Agreement, a new unit that would receive a negotiated contract, health insurance, and a wage increase – all of which are well deserved since tutors and interventionists have done a phenomenal job in supporting academic success.

Warrant article #5 appropriates funding (not new funding) to purchase the solar array. Private investors funded it, but in three more years, it can be bought out and its investment will translate to the taxpayers of the district.

Warrant article #6 appropriates funding for the turf field, which has a life span of 10-13 years depending on use. It is a predictable cost for the district and in order to not ask taxpayers for funding, the board will designate funding in a field trust.

Warrant article #7 establishes a fee collection for renting buildings and fields and sets aside this money for the upkeep of the fields and athletic facilities.

Meeting Dates

A public hearing will be hosted by each town on the following dates:

Durham Town Council: January 8 – Durham Town Hall 7:00 pm

Madbury Selectman Meeting: January 12 – Madbury Town Hall 9:00 am

Lee Selectman Meeting: January 22 – Lee Safety Complex 6:00 pm

Annual Meeting Deliberative Session 1

February 6th – ORMS Recital Hall 7:00 pm (Snow Date: Feb 8)

Voting Day (Annual Meeting Session II)

Durham – ORHS 7:00 am – 7:00 pm

Lee – Lee Safety Complex 7:00 am – 7:00 pm

Madbury – Madbury Town Hall 11:00 am-7:00 pm

Dr. Morse asked if anyone from the public had any questions, and no one spoke.

Denise Day made a motion to close the public hearing, 2nd by Brian Cisneros. Motion passed 7-0.

Heather Smith made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 7:33 pm, 2nd by Brian Cisneros. Motion passed 7-0.