

February 6, 2024, Deliberative Session Meeting Minutes

Moderator Williams gave extra time to allow everyone to sign in. Present at the meeting were 34 members of the public, 10 district administrators, 6 Board members, and Attorney Diane Gorrow.

Moderator Williams opened the meeting at 7:04. He confirmed that everyone had obtain a ballot voting card. He asked that all rise for the pledge. He introduced the members of the School Board. He then called Giana Gelsey to the podium.

Gianna presented the Distinguished Service Award to Amy Sterndale. The district recognized her for her unwavering commitment and dedication to improving the district communication practices. Amy volunteered many hours of her own time to bring her expertise in communications to the district as an integral member of the Superintendent's Communication Committee. As a key member of the committee, she created and presented information to the School Board on multiple occasions. Her presentations laid the groundwork for district discussions around effective communications and the need for a communications coordinator. Amy guided the district as they embarked on a journey to design the communication coordinator position and collaborated with the team throughout the process. The district is very fortunate to have Amy as a member of the community.

Moderator Williams reviewed the process for explaining and discussing each warrant article and how members can participate in the meeting. He stated he would not be using Roberts Rules of Order and that members of the public can speak on each article and amendments can be made to certain portions of a warrant. Voting will be by voter card. Participants must be a member of either Durham, Lee, or Madbury to vote. He then read the posting notice. Beginning with the warrant he then read the details. He then asked for a motion to clarify some grammatical issues with the remainder of the warrant.

Denise Day made a motion to correct the 2024 Warrant Article by shifting the heading so that the second line begins the words "The State..." and in paragraph 3 change the number "6" to "7" and in Article #7 at the end of the first sentence change the word "funds" to "fields. Second was made by Matt Bacon.

Moderator Williams explained the changes proposed by this motion. He called for a vote, and all voted in favor. Motion passed.

Article 3 was presented by Heather Smith. She read Article 3 and moved the article. Second was by Denise Day.

Heather presented the information on the article. She presented data on academic standards, college enrollment and assessment data. She then presented enrollment data. She went on to explain some of the accomplishments of students in the district. Oyster River has a district of performers, athletes, mentors, and teachers. All this ties into the district mission. The budget reflects the financial needs to carry out our mission. She explained the budget drivers. There is an additional position of a Mental Health Counselor and a Strings Teacher. Other increases include a health insurance increase of 15.0%, expenses for various union contracts, and the bond on the middle school. She reviewed the additional revenues expected to cover some of the increase. She explained the estimated tax impact of the proposed budget and how the amounts are distributed to each town. Moderator Williams asked if there was anyone who would like to discuss the budget.

Dean Rubine of Lee stated that it looked like the difference of the budget is less than expected. Was there an amount cut to accomplish this? Heather explained that there was a retirement incentive to help offset the increase.

Erik Turcotte of Lee asked about the acronyms in the budget expenditures list, ORESPA, ORPASS, ORAA, and the Guild. It was explained that these represent the collective bargaining units for the district employees and the members of these units were given.

Moderator Williams called for a vote. Motion passed.

Article 4 was moved by Dan Klein. Dan read the article. Second by Matt Bacon.

Dan explained this article represents the newest bargaining unit in the district. He explained that this unit supports the tutors who serve students in all the schools. He reviewed the coat items in the proposal and the challenges of remaining competitive in the market for these positions.

Dean Rubin of Lee asked how many staff members this covers and what are the total wages and benefits. Amy Ransom explained there are 11 members of this unit, and some of the increase is due to adding retirement and days to the contract. Dean asked what the percentage increase was for these employees. Dr Morse explained that it varies based on the individual.

Krista Butts explained that she is a member of this unit and explained that most of them are being paid a significantly lower wage than teachers. They are certified or working on their certification. This contract was created at a minimum and fair rate. She asked for support of this article.

Moderator Williams called for a vote. Motion passed.

Warrant Article 5 was read by Matt Bacon. Matt made a motion to pass the article and second was by Tom Newkirk.

Matt explained this is the fourth year of the request to pay off the solar panel on the middle school. The best option for savings in energy costs are obtained when this is purchased after 6 years.

Loren Selig of Durham is curious as to how much was saved by having the solar panels on the school. Dr Morse explained that they have not done an analysis of the savings. He did explain there are also savings for paying labor for bus drivers who park the buses under the solar canopy before a snowstorm, so they no longer need to clean off the tops of the buses. He did not have a figure for this savings amount.

John Cowell asked if these articles would be added to the amount in article 3 to make up the total budget. Matt explained that these funds would come from excess funds in the 2023-24 budget. Articles 4 will be added to the total. Article 5-7 will not be added to the budget total.

Joe Friedman from Durham asked if there was an estimated cost of the maintenance for the panels after they are purchased and who will maintain them. Joe asked if there would be an inspection at year 7 to determine the condition. Dr Morse indicated that they would be evaluated, and the district would be responsible for the cost and maintenance of the panels when they are purchased by the district.

Moderator Williams called for a vote. Motion passed.

Article 6 was read by Tom Newkirk, and he moved the article. Second was by Heather Smith.

Tom explained that the principle behind the article is to put funds aside so the district would not be hit with a big hit to the budget. We would be putting aside funds each year so it would not be a big impact to the budget. This enables us to put money away to deal with these large expenses. This helps us prepare for a time when we have these major expenses.

John Parsons of Durham asked which fund the track replacement would come out of. Denise Day indicated it would be out of article 7 that she would be presented next.

Dean Rubine of Lee asked if there is a reason why there are so many funds for this purpose. Is there a reason to have 2 different funds? Amy Ransom explained that one is a revolving fund. Dean asked why the cost is less than the total paid to construct it. Is this the only way to fund this type of expense. Dr Morse explained the Board is trying to be good stewards and put money aside so there would not be a bump in taxes.

Christian Kuhn asked how much was in the fund at the end of last year and where does the balance go? Dr Morse explained how the end of the year balance must be used or reserved.

Vote on article 6 was called by Moderator Williams and the motion passed.

Article 7 was moved and read by Denise Day. Second by Matt Bacon.

Denise explained that the funding for this would be different from the previous article. These funds would come from the fees charged for the use of the fields and put in a revolving fund. By collecting these fees and allocating them to this fund, the district will be able to offset the expenses for maintaining the districts fields.

Moderator Williams called for a vote, and all voted in favor of the article. Motion passed.

Moderator Williams thanked the district for setting up the meeting and the residents for coming to the meeting. He read times for voting in each town on March 12, 2024.

John Parsons of Durham asked everyone to look around and appreciate what the voters approved for the facility around them. He then made a motion to adjourn. Second was by Loren Selig. Motion passed.

Meeting ended at 8:11 PM.

Respectfully Submitted by Susan Caswell