

# WILTON-LYNDEBOROUGH COOPERATIVE SCHOOL DISTRICT

## Budget Committee - Public Hearing Minutes

Thursday February 7, 2019 at 7:00 p.m. in the Middle/High School Cafeteria

**Committee Membership:** Chair Leslie Browne (Facilities Committee Rep.), Vice Chair Christine Tiedemann, Secretary Lisa Post (Strategic Planning Committee), Pam Altner, Jennifer Bernet (Strategic Planning Committee), Kevin Boette, Dennis Golding (School Board Rep.), Edwina Hastings (School Board Rep.), William Ryan (Facilities Committee Rep.), Alex LoVerme (SB Budget Committee Representative).

1. **Call to Order:** Chair Browne called the Public Hearing to order at 7:03 p.m., and welcomed the public to the hearing for the FY 2019/2020 School Budget. All Committee members were present and introduced.
2. **Presentation of the proposed 2019/2020 Operating Budget with Specified Warrant Articles:** Chair Browne reviewed the process of preparing the budget which started in September with joint meetings with the School Board where the Superintendent and Administrators came to us with their proposed budgets and explained what they were hoping to spend the money on and accomplish in the process. We were able to ask questions and spent a considerable amount of time discussing the various budgets for the various departments. Chair Browne reviewed the presentation with the public. She noted that there is a Capital Improvement Plan in place that was established to map out projects to keep the facilities in good shape. Currently, we are in year 4 of 5 to resurface the roof at WLC roof. The HS Bathroom will be upgraded and the chimneys repointed at FRES in the coming year. The \$60K Warrant Article is to continue to invest in the CIP. The balance in this account is currently \$90,451K. Chair Browne indicated that the taxpayers have supported the school in accomplishing this and believe we are on the right track.
3. **Public Comment: Chair Browne opened public comment and requested speakers state their name, town and speak up.**

**Jeff Jones, Wilton:** What is the line of sight on the revenues coming in from the state this year given the bump every year versus what we have budgeted for in taxes and how was the process to go through that and how do you feel about this coming year. Chair Browne replied that the revenues numbers are given to us. Committee member Lisa Post stated that the final numbers are looked at by Department of Education in March/April and paid in April/May. The final determination is not made until then as they are looking at a couple of different formulas: the amount of student that are in attendance on a daily basis; and students that transfer in and out of the district. Those numbers cannot be looked at until the end of the school year. The revenues that are paid this year are from the FY17 budget year numbers, two years back. It is as accurate that you can get at this time but there are so many different factors that come in to play. One of the things we discussed as a Budget Committee is to work with the Department of Education to dig deeper into the revenues and learn more about the revenue stream so we can more accurately project those numbers in the future. There will always be some wiggle room there for things to change. Mr. Jones stated that as taxpayers they appreciate better transparency so there are no surprises on the second half and know that there has been a lot of chatter on that. Mrs. Post stated that the Budget Committee would really like to get to those numbers as well because it is a reflection on us. Committee member Kevin Boette suggested the public speak with legislators up in Concord. Being a former Town Selectman and on the Town Budget Committee of Lyndeborough and now on the Budget Committee for the School Board, Mr. Boette stated over the last 10 years Concord has been working to balance their budget and has reduced the funding to the towns and schools while the towns still have the financial obligations to make. He suggested that collective voices telling Concord they need to honor their commitments too would go a long way to alleviate the local tax situation.

**Ms. Ruth Smith, Wilton:** She asked for a heads up when we are given this information in May or June and stated "I damn near fainted when I got my tax bill in December." She asked the Committee not to set false expectations. If you tell us you are going to come out even and there is an increase you can imagine the shock. Give us a heads up and give us the information. Don't mislead us and don't give us the information until you are likely to know.

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**Mr. Matt Ballou, Lyndeborough School Board Member:** Questioned if this was last year's budget plus CBA contractual obligations? Chair Browne affirmed this. Mr. Ballou asked the difference in the numbers and asked if it was a flat budget. Chair Browne indicated that it was essentially a flat budget and the difference between the SAU proposed amount was \$163K. Mr. Ballou stated he had read minutes from the September 25, 2019 and indicated during the CPI index category summary that the Committee was not looking for a flat budget and that Chair Browne stated that the Committee is looking for a return on investment, a good education for a good price and cannot make any recommendations on the budget until all information is received and presented. Mr. Ballou wanted to know if CPI was taken into account and factored in. Committee member Kevin Boette stated that were declining enrollments and there would be less revenue as well. Mr. Ballou disputed the decline in numbers. Chair Browne explained that Pre-School and Kindergarten are not counted in the same revenue calculation. Mr. Boette speaking to Mr. Ballou said you have to understand that when the District went to full-day Kindergarten, we voted that in last year, and the State does not pay for full-day kindergarten. Chair Browne stated that we don't get the full revenue but we still have to pay for them. Mr. Ballou (speaking for the School Board) stated that the Board feels that the Kindergarten numbers will increase or will at least level out. Chair Browne confirmed that we have more students but we don't have the same amount of revenue for those students and taxpayers have to be aware of this. She responded to Mr. Ballou's question: we did not want to come out of the gate saying we want a flat budget. We wanted to hear all the information and were open to listen to it. We were not setting a demand to start with, but in the end the Committee determined what we thought taxpayers would want. Mr. Ballou, (speaking as a School Board member), said he voted against this budget "the Board went the other way and it passed 5 to 4." Chair Browne stated that at the end of the year, we have an unexpended fund balance somewhere between \$100 -\$200K, and that the \$163K was close to the unexpended fund balance and they only had to tighten the belt in a few areas and may need to hold off on a few purchases until the end of the year until we see if there is money left over and that was the general consensus. Mr. Ballou, holding the line-item document, indicated he was uncomfortable not knowing what was in it. Chair Browne stated the Committee only sets the budget number and that it is the School Board who makes the decisions on how to spend the funds. Mr. Ballou expressed his frustration that the School Board did not negotiate with the Budget Committee. Mr. Boette stated there was a tremendous tax increase this year and we need to reign in the budget a little bit because if the State goes in the same direction again, there will be another increase. He stated we spent a lot of time on the budget and felt the Committee put together a fair number to present to the voters. He said we must think about our kids, the teachers, the Administration and also the taxpayers. This is not anything radical, lower budget numbers were looked at. This is a moderate even-handed budget that won't affect services. Mr. Ballou continued to express his frustrations that as a member of the School Board, he did get to negotiate with the Budget Committee and that the School Board supported the Committee's proposed budget.

**Carol LeBlanc, Wilton School Board Member:** Ms. LeBlanc stated she voted against this budget. She commented that the Budget Committee reference declining numbers in coming up with this budget and asked if the Chair agreed that the numbers had gone up. She felt that the students would follow through (to First Grade) and felt it might be a bubble and felt enrollment would continue to go up and "isn't that a wonderful thing, something we all want because we get more money from the State and that's what bothers me". We are addressing the education of the children not just numbers of students. We need to give them enough education as parents and taxpayers are expecting. When the numbers go up and there is no revenue stream to cover the increasing enrollment, then you are decreasing what the school administration will need just to maintain where we are. "We are not looking for bells and whistles and feel we are missing something here. That's the way I feel, and I feel very strongly, in case you didn't know."

**Thomas Schultz, Wilton:** Mr. Schultz noted that on the general fund revenue page there is a line item for Kindergarten Keno Aid of \$55K in the 18/19 and 19/20 budget, and suspected it covered a half day of kindergarten expenses. He wanted to clarify that when it was said there was no revenue for Kindergarten, it was the income for the second half of the day that was being referred to. Chair Browne stated this was correct. Mr. Schultz stated the school has 130 staff members and is that is a substantial number of staff but felt that one position was

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missing, a School Resource Officer. He would like the School to seriously think about this since over half the districts in the State of New Hampshire fund these positions. The school, the towns of Wilton and Lyndeborough should look into putting in an SRO. This is one thing you are missing more than anything else.

**Ruth Smith, Wilton:** She recently started tutoring a student in Middle School who was struggling, and she went to his teachers for the text books to loan them to her and the teacher indicated they do not use them. When she reviewed them, she understood why they did not use them. She has had 35 years in experience in Higher Education, choosing text books for her classes and content editor for publishers. She indicated that those books are not a benefit to anyone and that the teachers indicated they did not choose the books. She felt that teachers should choose the books and not waste money on books that just stand on shelves.

**Matthew Black, Wilton:** He questioned if the proposed budget is adequate to maintain the same staffing level as this year. Chair Browne indicated that it is up to the School Board to make those determinations. Her impression of the School Board is that education is very important to them and they support their staff and curriculum in all of our discussions, but it is up to the School Board on what decisions they make. Mr. Black stated the budget is basically a flat budget that allowed for an increase for mandated salaries and questioned if there was an expectation that there would be more money needed for utilities and that money was not appropriated in the budget for this. Chair Browne indicated that there are areas that could be reduced for the few areas of increase and there were other areas that decreased such a medical benefits. Mr. Black questioned if the result was they would have to cut back next year. Committee Member Boette replied that there is a \$130K increase over last year's budget and felt it would be very easy for them to maintain everything as it is today without cuts. He stated we provide the budget number and the School Board decides what to do with those funds. We used the input from the educators, all departments and principals who make their presentations for what money they want and what to use it for and the Committee sits down and has discussions, looks at what is needed and wanted and comes up with a balance between services for the students and consideration of the taxpayers. He felt that there will be the same staff levels and services with this budget and that the School Board are just going to have to think a little bit more and might have to wait on some of these purchases until later in the year before they make expenditures on things that might not have to happen. Mr. Black asked if the Committee knew if the School Board agreed with that and Chair Browne stated that the School Board voted to support this number though it was a split decision and will up to the new Board to decide how to expend these funds. Mr. Boette reiterated that this is not a reduction but a 1% increase over last year's budget. Mr. Black was still concerned they would not have the same amount of money as the previous year to spend. Committee member Lisa Post stated that they will have the same amount of money because at the end of every year there is an unexpended fund balance that goes back to the towns. Part of our discussions is trying to be creative to provide for everyone's needs, the taxpayers and the students. The Budget Committee over the last few years had initiated the push for higher student achievement and test scores and as looked at this from a return on investment angle. We are concerned with the students and there are several people serving on this Committee that have children in the school. Their concerns are for their children and the rest of the children in the school. However, we have a responsibility as an elected official to consider the taxpayers. You heard tonight that Lyndeborough residents had difficulties with the unexpected increase in the school taxes last year. It has not changed. It went up and stayed up. It was difficult for many people on fixed incomes and those without salary increases and we have to weigh that. As part of our discussions, we looked for creative solutions and since the school turns back almost 2% to the towns at the end of the year, increasing the budget by 1% allowed for wiggle room though there may not be as much that is returned to the towns. With knowledge that we had, we decided it was better to give the taxpayers a little relief this year while trying to maintain the school and provide the necessary resources for them to have their teacher workshop days, extended calendar so teachers have more training time. We felt it was a win-win for everybody. Mr. Black stated he wanted to be super-duper clear that we are tightening things up a bit and will use the unexpended fund balance and hopefully everything will work out and felt it was opposite of a flat budget. He wanted to make sure they were not getting any less money. Mr. Boette stated the idea was to keep it flat and there is always money left at the end of the year even if they don't get everything they ask for, they probably will have everything they need. They usually have a chunk (of money) left over at the end of the year and perhaps

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there won't be a chunk that is left next year. Mr. Boette has 100% confidence in this budget that whatever the school needs, they will have the resources. Mr. Black stated has a little knowledge of business budgeting and knows that you need to keep a fund balance because you can't spend to the exact dollar and felt they (the school) could not plan their budget for it. Mrs. Post stated there is the Capital Reserve Fund that can be used and has been used in the past. Chair Browne stated there is a Special Education Fund that can only be used for Special Education needs and that has \$250K so if a student moved into the district, we do have that fund available. It certainly makes it easier on the Administration. To estimate a \$12 million dollar budget is certainly difficult to do for sure said Chair Browne.

**Adam LaValle, Lyndeborough:** He stated that at the School Board meeting he specifically asked if there would be cuts from the teaching staff with this budget. Their answer was not an answer. They said they have to look at this and that and blah, blah, blah, great okay. I don't see how anybody is comfortable voting on the budget when they have no idea what the impact on the school will be. Especially people with students and while you may be creative and good with numbers, when you ask the School Board what is your plan and they say we have to talk to the superintendent, to me, that is not really real or solid and makes me super uncomfortable voting on anything like that. I run a business and if someone proposed that to me, I would say come back with details. It doesn't make sense at all. When I asked if we would have an answer before March 9, the answer was probably not. So I don't understand how a town can make an educated vote when nobody is willing to give us the details. Chair Browne stated she understands this and part of the problem was the timing this year. We seemed not to get to decisions until closer to the Public Hearing. Really nothing is set in stone until after Public Hearing anyways of what is going to be brought to District Meeting. It was our job to come up with a budget we felt comfortable offering to taxpayers. We are here to listen to your input tonight on that. Mr. Lavalle replied he felt it was hard to give educated input when you don't know because people were originally talking about okay maybe eliminating a Middle School math and science teacher when they are already missing a Middle School math teacher. Mr. Boette stated that was whole different proposal. Mr. LaValle replied that he knew that but was worried that they will go back to that. He worried we are going to achieve low taxes but our houses won't be worth anything. Mr. Boette stated this budget won't create low taxes. Mr. LaValle continued that if our school system gets so bad, no one will want to move in. We have high taxes anyway, so if we have high taxes and nobody with a child will moves here then we will have low home values and our taxes will go down because we will be taxed on less valuable home. So I don't know what the School Board is going to do and I can't see being comfortable making a decision either way.

**Harry Dailey, Wilton School Board Chairman:** Chairman Dailey felt it was important to state that the process this year was no different from any other year. This is exactly the same process and if you listened to some of the discussion earlier such as revenue, we don't get those numbers until April/May time frame so we can't really come up with a solid game plan for September until we have all the variables that we have to work with. If you look at the difference between how a School District does a budget versus a town, a town and school district vote at the same time on their budget within a week of one another. The difference is the town votes on a budget that is already three months into it. The School District, the budget we are voting on and discussing tonight, doesn't even start for four or five more months. He felt it was important to realize that it is a different process for the school district than the town. He felt it would be irresponsible for the school district, in lesser extent the Budget Committee, to make commitments on things we don't know. We don't know what the revenue numbers are going to look like. We don't know what enrollments are going to look like. We don't know what students are going to sign up for certain classes. We don't have that information yet and that is an important piece to understand. It would be disingenuous of us to say we are "absolutely going to do this," when we don't know. Whoever the new School Board is has to make those kinds of decisions. If it makes any sense, if you look back at when the Strategic Committee brought forward to the School Board a proposal to eliminate two staff positions at the Middle School, I don't know if it was unanimously voted down but it was pretty darn close to it. That should give you some indication of the School Board's thought process regarding staffing. I can't say, because I don't know if I will be on the Board at that time. The School Board takes this process extremely seriously as does the Budget Committee. Again, this process this year is no different than any other year we have ever had. We can't make final decisions until after we have all the variables and all the facts before us and then the School Board will

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make the decisions. We have a pot of money to spend. We have a certain amount of revenue to work with. That is what the School Board will work with.

**Morgan Sasseville, Wilton:** Ms. Sasseville a student at WLC, stated she recently moved here from Milford and thinks the resource officer would be very beneficial here with some of the problems we have. The money we are getting here for next year is a little bit higher then this year and with that money I feel like we should hire a resource officer.

**Matt Ballou, Lyndeborough School Board member:** Mr. Ballou stated he disagreed with Mr. Dailey and said that normally this line item in the annual report will match the number that will be on the warrant and this year it will not. This is my only point. The process is not exact, it is slightly different. Mrs. Post, Budget Committee member, stated that the reason for this is everyone voted very late and the Committee did not want to specifically name items because the year before they had done this and the School Board was not receptive to that. She believed at that time when we made the recommendation, the Board told us they could not cut one penny. So the Budget Committee wanted to respect the School Boards ability to make their own choices and that we would look at the numbers as best as we could with revenue coming in and financial commitments with the curriculum coordinator, the change in calendar. There were a couple of other things the Strategic Committee looked at and it was all very carefully considered and voted on. Mrs. Post did not feel there was a big difference in process. We have done it this way every single time we have had a Public Hearing, we listen to public input, we adjourn this part of the hearing and we discuss what people want. I don't believe this line item was part of our presentation. Superintendent Lane brought that with him to have for people to look at and was not part of our presentation because we had the expectation that we were going to listen to everyone who came tonight and then go into a meeting. Mr. Ballou stated he understands and disagrees and thinks this was part of the towns' and school's annual reports and stated "you can correct me if I am wrong that it is usually matching the warrant" so I am just saying that is my only point. Mrs. Post stated that the Warrant has not been settled and hopes that it would be by District meeting.

**Jonathan Vanderhoof, Lyndeborough School Board member:** Mr. Vanderhoof stated that it is his first year on the Board. He sat through the whole process last year as a member of public and went to every School Board meeting and maybe missed one Budget Committee meeting. I agree with the Budget Committee one hundred percent that the way it went last year did not work well. Again I was at every Budget Committee meeting and they went through line-by-line indicating we don't think they need the money for this line here and yes we know this is going up so we have to give them money for this. They went through everything. They brought it back to the School Board and it was point, counter point, point, counter point. The Budget Committee presented everything and the School Board refuted everything. I think there were two items where they said eventually "I don't really need this," but it wasn't during Joint Session but after the Budget Committee left. During the Joint Session I felt this was very adversarial and felt this year it was a much better process. It is the Board's job to decide where the money goes and it is the Budget Committee's job to come up with the budget number. I know there are people here that probably disagree, some Board members, because that is the way it has been done in the past. As an observer of this, last year and as part of it this year, I personally feel it was a much better process this year.

**Morgan Sasseville, Wilton:** Ms. Sasseville noticed a lot of money was spent on technology and felt that technology was important but suggested we should be focusing on things to be fixed such as the Resource Officer and was wondering who makes the decision on how much money to spend on each thing and state she really didn't know how to word the question. Chair Browne stated there is a Technology Plan in place to update and replace technology throughout the schools and ultimately we don't decide anything. We look at past expenditures over the last few years and compare what was spent by line item and that is how we come up with the bottom line number. It is up to the School Board on how they spend their money.

**Tiffany Cloutier-Cabral, Wilton:** Ms. Cloutier-Cabral stated that last night at the School Board meeting I think they said that it was about \$20,000 per student that they invest. So if we have 50 kindergarteners, and this is an

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accounting thing for anyone who may be moving into town, that is \$100,000 correct. Chair Browne stated she did not understand the question. Ms. Cloutier-Cabral questioned that the children, kindergarten students, are not accounted for next year. Mr. Boette stated we budget for what is expected to come in which is about a million dollars for kindergarten. Ms. Cloutier-Cabral questioned if the \$1,000,000 was already in this proposed budget. Mr. Boette stated yes. Ms. Cloutier-Cabral stated that there is \$160K difference to which Mr. Boette replied that there are seniors that are leaving. Ms. Cloutier-Cabral replied there are not that many seniors in that particular class and does not offset the kindergarteners coming in. She asked if it was correct that it would be full-day kindergarten next year. Chair Browne stated there is currently full-day kindergarten. Ms. Post stated the Commissioner of Education noted at a recent meeting that it was a slow start for the Keno funds to come in, but they are hoping that funding increases over time will level out full-day kindergarten costs. Ms. Post stated there is no guarantee of an increase. Ms. Cloutier-Cabral suggested we leave the hoping out and wait until it all plays out so we have a better idea of what will happen. She stated that someone made a good point at the School Board meeting that our economy is this particular way now and you may not see that in two or three years. Ms. Post stated there are people who are on a fixed income who are not receiving a boost from the economy and some of those people did not get paid for a long time this year. We as a Budget Committee have to take everything into account. Although I said "hoping" it is really something because we are looking at a future budget where we don't know until, all the things come in like enrollment, how many students come in and go out of the districts like Mr. Dailey said, and noted there can be pretty big swings and which can bring the revenue numbers down with the lower enrollment numbers. When we are talking about lowers numbers, we are not necessarily referring to the numbers in the school right now we are talking about the revenues we are going to get from the lower numbers we had in the previous year. As we stated before, it takes time for everything to shake out because you are doing this before you have all your data from the end of the year. We are here, in February, and won't know until June how many are enrolled in kindergarten, how many students will graduate, how many students moved in and out of the district and the changes actually happen up to the day school starts and also changes happen throughout the school year. It is always in flux but that is the nature of schools.

**Edwina Hastings, Wilton Budget Committee Member** stated what has to be realized is that if you look at the Wilton Town Budget and Wilton votes for everything on the Warrant Articles, we are looking at a 7.8% increase in our taxes for just our town. If it is just the operational budget that passes, it is just 4.4% increase. Ms. Hastings did not know anybody who got a 4.4% raise. She stated though the economy is wonderful, it's not growing at 4.4% or 7.8% so anyone who has received a 3% raise has just lost 1+% so they are behind even though the economy is great. She commented that we are trying really hard to protect the children and give them a good education. She indicated that during the last couple of years, we (the School District) have hired 19 additional professionals for the classes, math consultants, Curriculum Coordinators and Response to Instruction position to help teachers teach the children. Mrs. Hastings stated "I really think we have done a nice job and that this is an adequate budget for now." Chair Browne commented that all the little increases that happen every year add up and since 2015/16, the portion of the school taxes have just about doubled, and that is a lot.

**Ruth Smith, Wilton:** commented to Edwina Hastings, that she thought the numbers were not percentages but dollars per thousand and asked Harry Dailey if she was correct. Mr. Dailey replied no. He stated the Wilton Town budget that was approved has gone up 4.4% and if all the Warrant Articles are approved, the total will be a 7.8% increase over last year. He stated that it is not 100% relevant but is a factor in the thought process. Ms. Smith stated that she is hearing a lot of excuses and that makes her very doubtful that the Committee is going to go back to deliberations and take into account what people said here seriously. She believed that it was just an excuse that we don't get this information. She stated "I hear excuses that are defenses that we have done a good job, this is the best budget for the school. Well I am sure you have all worked really hard and you have done the best job you can but again these excuses and protestations make me anxious that you really are taking the comments seriously and will factor them into your budget. Thank you." Chair Browne responded that these are not excuses, we are just explaining the process we went through and of course we are going to take in consideration what people are going to say. Ms. Smith commented that businesses have uncertainty when they are planning for the next planning period or when they plan for the next 10 years out but there are lots of statistical methods to

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employ that are very simple such as moving averages. Some can be very complex and forecasting methods can be highly complicated. Nonetheless, those tools are available and I suggest you look into them. You can reduce the uncertainty. I think the general sense here is that the uncertainty makes them feel very uncomfortable.

**Thomas Schultz, Wilton:** Mr. Schultz recognized that looking back he said something about spending more money and wanted to give credit to the Budget Committee for taking seriously the impact of the property tax increases that have been caused by the school tax increases over the last 15 years. "I have lived in Wilton as a taxpayer for 20 years and my property taxes have officially doubled as of this past year." The school makes up approximately 60% of the tax bill and even a 1% increase, and you're not flat, you are a 1% increase over last year and that is a substantial increase and it is going to continue. I appreciate the efforts that the Budget Committee has made as our elected officials to try to keep the taxes in check without undercutting or defunding the school. You did actually fund a slight 1.03% increase, that is not a defunding that is not a reduction that is an increase and every increase ends up in our property tax bills. He restated that he appreciated what the Committee has done to keep the property taxes somewhat reasonable.

**Morgan Sessevelle, Wilton:** noted that she was looking at the Graduation Assembly line for FRES/LCS and was wondering where the money is going for the proposed budget of \$5,000 for 2020 and do you pay for gowns. Chair Browne asked Mr. O'Connell to speak to that. Mr. O'Connell stated that that line includes some funding for materials for graduation ceremony at the end but it's a very small amount. A big portion of the \$5,000 funds enrichment assemblies, guest speakers for our students, our Artists-in-Residence program and other extensions and enrichment activities including funding for field trips.

**Matt Ballou, Lyndeborough School Board member:** stated that just to be clear and "I think you will agree, the one percent is contractually obligated items that were voted in on the prior years' CBA." Mr. Boette did not believe that the one percent is for the contractual obligations. The one percent is an increase over last year's budget, but the School Board spends their money as they fit. Mr. Boette stated "if you don't want to spend your one percent on the contractual agreement you don't have to." Chair Browne said it could have been reduced from somewhere else and that we had this whole discussion at the beginning of the budget season of what is really a flat budget, does it include contractual agreements or does it not, and we were all divided down the middle. So I am going to say it is last year's budget plus contractual agreements plus food service and special revenues is where we came up with our number.

**Adam LaValle, Lyndeborough:** Since the Budget Committee is going to consider what people say and feel out here, I know I am not the only one that feels this way. I know a lot of people in Wilton and Lyndeborough that are still working and they feel "I am writing this all off on my Federal Tax Return." I know that doesn't work for the retired people, but I would rather pay \$50 more locally than to the Feds. That gets me nothing. So when you are considering this, consider how many people are still working are writing their local taxes off on their Federal Income Tax Return. If your property taxes are over \$10K you are probably pretty successful and should probably not squabble on your taxes. Mr. Boette asked if Mr. LaValle was in support of this budget or not? Mr. LaValle stated he is in support of a budget that will maintain the staff level and can't get an answer on that and stated that "some of us do not trust the ultimate decision maker on where this money goes." Mr. Boette suggested Mr. LaValle run for the School Board because that is where the decisions are made and noted that it is not a one-to-one write off on taxes, if you go up \$50 in your property taxes, you don't get \$50 back from the Feds and from someone who just did their taxes, itemizing does even hit my bracket.

**Matthew Black, Wilton:** I am understanding now that you are going to go back again perhaps make changes based on public feedback and just want to be super clear as a taxpayer. I would encourage you to go back and change the recommendation that is more in line with what was asked by the Superintendent and the Principals of the Schools. I feel I can't micromanage every single dollar that is being spent and have to trust somebody and I tend to trust the instincts and requests of the people who run the school and encourage you go back and consider changing the budget recommendation to be more in line with their request.

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**John Clark, Lyndeborough:** I just wanted to say that I would recommend against gambling our kids futures on gambling revenue and try and avoid making that an integral part of your budget. We have seen with the explosion of gambling nationwide the overall revenue hasn't increased dramatically and ask that we do not rely on this funding.

**Tiffany Cloutier-Cabral, Wilton:** Questioned whether the Committee applies for grants or the district itself. Chair Browne stated that the school does and depends upon which department the grant is for. Special Education will apply for some on themselves and Technology has applied for some as well. Lise, the Business Administrator applies for them so there are lots of different departments looking at them and applying for them. Ms. Cloutier-Cabral asked if this Committee is made aware of those grants. The Chair stated they are part of the presentations. Ms. Cloutier-Cabral asked if the Committee knew of all the grants that are possible for our district. Chair Browne responded she does not know for sure but does know that our staff is really good at looking for and applying for grants. I know the Curriculum Coordinator has applied for some that have been very good for our district. My impression is they do a good job with that. She also asked if there are grants our towns can apply that can help our fixed-income residents. Mrs. Post stated that the Town of Lyndeborough adjusts the taxes for seniors who cannot afford their taxes and asked Mr. Post who stated it was approximately two percent this year but that increases other people's taxes. Mr. Dailey stated that Wilton does this as well but it does not make the tax go away, it spreads it out a little bit more. Chairman Dailey stated education grants are tricky. In the past, the district applied for a lot of grants that sounded great. Grants either fund a position or program and then one year they pull the funding out, and you have gotten used to having a particular program and if you like it, the only way to keep it is to be added into the budget. Educational grants are a little trickier to deal with. I can tell you that it is impossible to apply for every grant out there. We do a good job at the SAU and Principal level to apply or the grants we are eligible for. There are not as many as there used to be and they come with very specific strings attached to them.

**Jonathan Vanderhoof, Lyndeborough School Board Member:** Commenting on the grants, Mr. Vanderhoof said when the elementary school budget was proposed to us, there was a line item for a new science curriculum for \$22K. At that time it was explained to us that they thought about putting in a new math curriculum that was going to be about \$25K but didn't think that this would be required at this point because it wasn't the right time. At the next meeting, it was explained to us that we got a grant to cover the \$22K for the science curriculum that we wanted to get and that the math program we were not quite ready to have in place, was now in the budget proposal. So just because we got a grant doesn't mean it hits the taxes. We were going to fund the science curriculum, and it was great we ended up with the grant, but now something we were not ready to have, is now in the budget because we got the grant. It could have been a reduction to the budget, and will probably end up being a reduction but it is hard to make these decisions (when you have these variables). The kindergarten program is in our first year, and we didn't project 53 students, we projected 40. It (full-day Kindergarten) has been a great success, and that is awesome; but we don't know if those kids are going to continue on to 1<sup>st</sup> Grade. We don't know if we are going to get 50 students (in Kindergarten) this year. There was a lot explained last year when the Kindergarten program was out there that we would most likely anticipate savings because we had Kindergarten. None of those projections were brought forward because it has only been one year, so we don't want to project savings for one year even though that was how we sold the program. There is a lot of stuff like that is going on and to say that we just want to accept the proposed budget as is and give them everything they want is a little ridiculous. If you go to the meetings, you hear them (the Budget Committee) talk about all the examples, where they think they can cut and where they think they can't cut. It is not just this meeting they said here's the number. There was a lot of effort put into it. Mr. Vanderhoof stated there have been comments made that this isn't the same thing, and we usually go point-to-point (on line-items) and just because we didn't go point-to-point at the Joint Sessions doesn't mean the Budget Committee didn't go point-to-point at their meetings which means they decided not to bring that point-by-point forward (because the adversarial stance the School Board took last year).



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Mr. Boette stated that budget negotiations are just that “a negotiation,” so there is a lot of negotiation going on. The Administration comes with what they want, it’s not paired down. They come in with what they would love to do. The Budget Committee listens to their proposals, we listen, ask questions, talk with them and go through line-by-line for every single budget item we discussed. Then, we come up with a project number. If is Administration does not get all the funds they asked for, the students are not going to go uneducated. We are not, not funding what is needed. They are not getting 100% of their request but it’s just a request (not a need).

**Matthew Black, Wilton:** Mr. Black was uncomfortable with the way Mr. Boette characterized the requests. Mr. Boette then clarified this year there was \$130K added into the budget over the previous year. All we did was not vote to fund \$160K of their request. Mr. Black reiterated that there needs to be enough money to give them room, and he doesn’t feel their request is a pie-in-sky thing they want, rather a sober request of what they need to educate the children. Mr. Boette responded it is not pie-in-sky, it is what they wanted not what they needed, and on the Town Budget Committee it is the same thing. Mrs. Post added that a good many of us have been on the Committee for some time and every year we go through this process where the SAU, LCS, FRES, WLC, Technology presents what they would like with a dollar figure, there have been plenty of times where we have approved their numbers then they decide they don’t want or need something they asked for. So we have learned that wants don’t necessarily transfer to must haves. There are some things they must have, and we try to meet those obligations. It is really our experience over the years of how the budget goes that helps us to make the decisions we make now. It is experience with working with these budgets and how it is presented. We have had more than one superintendent in this time as well and things changed a little. However, it has basically the remained the same with departments presenting what they would like and what is needed and the Committee has to make these decisions on behalf of taxpayers, administration, teachers and the students. We want our kids to flourish academically, whether our tests are accurately reflecting that we don’t know yet. That (Curriculum Coordinator and Response to Instruction positions to improve test scores) was put into place just a couple of years ago, and we are trying to let these things play out over time, because it takes time for these things to happen. So we try not to change too much too fast. Mrs. LeBlanc always says “how do we know if we are making progress if we keep on changing things.” So somethings we try to keep year-to-year to see if we move our progress along.

**Matthew Black, Wilton:** Mr. Black referred to the one percent increase and that we are trying to take care of people on fixed incomes which he felt was totally true and relevant and he respects that. “I think the one thing the Budget Committee needs to think about looking at is inflation or CPI in the 2-3% range, and I would feel better hitting that target as opposed to hitting something much lower because you won’t get as much for your money.” Chair Browne offered that next year our bond is dropping off and that will relieve about \$340K, and there are plans to increase the Capital Improvement Plan that we put into the Building Fund but also expect some relief to be given to taxpayers as well.

**Mr. Vanderhoof, Lyndeborough School Board Member:** Responding to the inflation statement, Mr. Vanderhoof stated that if you looked at the slide where it was said “this is where we have the wiggle room,” we don’t need to factor in inflation for the \$8,758,228 in staffing. We know what that number is, so we don’t need the CPI increase on the whole budget of \$12.5M. You only have to increase it on the portion where it applies.

**Matt Manerino, Wilton:** Mr. Manerino stated he has a child in all three schools and thinks he can speak for everyone that the overriding comments have been “we are facing a lot of uncertainty.” This may be the first time a lot of us have been seeing this process and seeing that we are making the budget and putting together a plan without all the information and understands that these things don’t happen inside a vacuum. He stated that “you have done the best you could with numbers and have put a lot of work into, but for some of us who are getting involved in the process for the first time this, this hasn’t been a great year for the school district.” The emergency response and staffing issues and fair or not, that type of uncertainty reflects not only on the school but the School Board and the Budget Committee. Jon (referring to Jon Vanderhoof) mentioned that it was a more adversarial process last year. “Maybe that might not be the most comfortable position to be in, but going line-by-line may be more adversarial but more transparent.” There are many factors. Parents have been left in the dark. They were

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not informed about the 6<sup>th</sup> Grade math teacher in a timely manner. The answers to my questions about the emergency response when the phones went down left me with more questions. Again, fair or not, all of these things reflect on this process, and I can understand the frustration from the parents and you (the Budget Committee) have to understand their frustration with the margins being so small leaving just a little bit wiggle room when so many things have already gone wrong this year.

Mr. Boette stated he would like to ask a question of Mr. Dailey and stated the questions coming from the audience saying "everything is all uncertain like we don't know anything." I don't know how that got into the audience because I don't feel that uncertainty about what is going on. I am very, very confident this will work and ask for the vibe of the School Board. Are you feeling there is an incredible amount of uncertainty and we are just winging it? Mr. Dailey stated that from having been on the School Board for over a decade, the process is a little different each year. There are small differences and tweaks and pieces of it that work better in different years. "I think the result of the process gets better each year, some years are better than other." If you pay attention and follow the process, this is about a four-month process for the School Board and Budget Committee to sit down and literally at every single meeting go line-by-line through hundreds of lines of information. "I believe the Budget Committee does a great job of asking questions and challenging. That is their role, it is their responsibility to work on behalf of the taxpayers in order to be able to challenge and keep a check-and-balance with the School Board and School District." He feels they have done great job with it. Intelligent people can look at the same information but come to different conclusions which does not mean one is right and one is wrong. "This process has been extremely transparent. Every single document from any meeting that we talk about is posted on the SAU website at least three to five days before every single meeting." It's up there today with not only the meeting minutes, but every single document we've looked. This is an exhaustive, painstaking process we go through. It is not, show up to a meeting and make a decision. Last night at the School Board meeting some people made a comment you just all the sudden vote on a number. Well it's been four months getting to that number, and it has been a long, long process that everyone has gone through. The SAU and Principals start this process in August and by the time it gets to us, there have been several months and many hours of work put into the process. Then all the stakeholders come in. We go through every single department's budget line-by-line. What you are witnessing tonight and at District Meeting is a culmination of all those months of work. "None of these decisions are made in vacuums. None of these decisions are taken lightly by anybody. For those of you at the School Board meeting last night, you saw it was a split vote. Again, that doesn't mean half are right and half are wrong. It is just a difference of opinion on what they think is needed to run this district." Chairman Dailey believes in some cases we are overly transparent with this process. "Yes, there were some incidences in the School District this year that for multiple reasons we could have done a better job with. We take all of those as learning opportunities. We try to come out and fix them and repair what we can. There are some things we can't do. For those of you who question personnel matters, we can't discuss those in public by law, and we won't. We have to protect, by law, peoples' privacy. Can we do a better job? Absolutely. As far as this budget process goes, it has been extremely transparent. If you go on the SAU website you can look at every document we looked at in the last four months in detail and the minutes of every single meeting."

Mr. Boette stated that Alex LoVerme is the Budget Committee liaison from the School Board and asked Mr. LoVerme if he had any comments, because Mr. Boette worried that the perception of the audience is that "we just spun the wheel and it landed on a number and is hoping it works. I don't want you to walk away thinking that."

Mr. LoVerme stated in his opinion, I have student in the Middle and High School, and like Matt (Black) was talking about situations that happened in the school. As a parent, I have lost some confidence in the school in the way it is run because we weren't notified. But, we can't take that as affecting our budget. We spent a lot of time looking at the budget. We can't say if we are going to cut staff members or equipment. We don't know what the future is going to bring us. Yes we have more students, but the school is about the same size it was in the 70's. We are spending more in our building, our building is bigger. FRES is bigger so it is going to cost us more. The Budget Committee spent a lot of time looking at the numbers. They spent a lot of time looking at line items but did not come back and say "cut a teacher, cut a principal, cut a superintendent, cut buses. They just came back with a

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number, but they did look at what could be cut.” Sitting in both meetings, I am pretty confident in this budget and would like it to be a million dollars higher, but I know people who just can’t afford their taxes. It’s unfortunate. The town is also going to raise our taxes even higher. But, this budget I am confident in.

**Bailey Peters, Student:** Asked if teachers’ salaries are part of the budget, and what is more important, hiring a new teacher for the Middle School or spending it on things you want to spend it on? Chair Browne responded that salaries make up almost two-thirds of the whole budget. “Again, we just vote on a bottom line number, and it is up to the School Board on how they want to spend it. I do feel like the School Board values education, their employees, teachers and staff. My guess is it is not going to come from staff cuts because they voted that down the last time it came up a month and a half ago when they talked about reorganizing the Middle School.” Chair Browne stated questions will be kept to the budget. What the School Board decides to do with staff or any other issues that are happening is up to them. This is strictly a public hearing for next year’s budget.

Chair Browne asked if there were any other comments on the budget and hearing none, stated the District Meeting is Saturday, March 9, 2019 at 9:00 a.m. at WLC. “This ends the public hearing part. As a Budget Committee we will have a conversation. Chair Browne asked the Committee if they had any final thoughts they would like to share.” Ms. Hastings thanked the audience for coming out. Mrs. Post thanked them as well and stated that “despite what you may feel, we are going to talk about how you feel and the conversations we had tonight.” Chair Browne commented that it is “her guess that we may not have a final number tonight and we will schedule another meeting. Even if we still come to District Meeting with this number, anybody on the floor is free to say whatever they would like and change it in any way. We are strictly making a recommendation to the taxpayers, but you as the voters are free to vote how you want.” Mr. Boette stated this is what gets presented to the voters and can be made larger or smaller and voted on at the District Meeting.

#### **4. Budget Committee discussion regarding public input and motion to change or accept the Budget and Warrant Article recommendations.**

The Committee discussed and agreed to take some time in order to carefully consider the public comments from this evening and will deliberate at the next scheduled meeting of the Committee.

#### **5. Other Business:** The next meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, February 12, 2019 at 6:30 p.m. in the WLC MS/HS Media Room.

#### **6. Adjournment 8:43 p.m.**

***A Motion was made by Christine Tiedemann to adjourn the Public Hearing at 8:43 p.m.; Seconded by Edwina Hastings. Voting: All in favor. Motion passed unanimously.***

Respectfully Submitted,  
Lisa C.M. Post, Secretary