

# WILTON-LYNDEBOROUGH COOPERATIVE SCHOOL

## BUDGET COMMITTEE MEETING- DRAFT MINUTES

Tuesday December 9th, 2024, 6:35 PM, WLC Library

**Committee Membership:** Jeff Jones (Chair), Adam Lavallee (Vice Chair), Michelle Alley (School Board Rep), Bridget Mooney (Secretary) Jennifer Bernet, Phil Brooks, Alex LoVerme, Bill Ryan, Jonathan Vanderhoof, Vacant – Wilton

**Present:** Jeff Jones, Bill Ryan, Jonathan Vanderhoof, Bridget Mooney, Michelle Alley (online), Jennifer Bernet (online)

**Absent:** Adam Lavallee, Alex LoVerme, Phil Brooks,

Jeff Jones suggested that because there is a large public presence (roughly 20) maybe we should begin the meeting with public comments.

Jonathan Vanderhoof made the motion to alter the agenda for the meeting to begin with public comments. The motion was seconded by Bill Ryan. All ayes.

### Public Comments

The first speaker was **Tatiana Franko** from Lyndeborough. She is a single person with a child in school and wonders how she can pay her taxes. She's concerned about the working people in town who have difficulty paying their taxes and requests that the board find things to cut from our school budget.

The second speaker was **Don Rankin** from Wilton. He made this statement:

Yes, our tax bills went up significantly and if you attended both the Town and School Meetings you would have expected it. At both meetings, those present approved just about everything with strong assent. At the school we are working to correct multiple years of underfunding to sustain the needed maintenance and improvement at the schools. We are playing catch up from all that was kicked down the road. The voters not only asked for this spending but insisted that the School Board use the funds approved to do the work needed in a timely manner. Voters also funded future expenditures, so they don't hit us all in one year. The problem is almost all the cost of public education is borne at the local level. The State has lost two school funding lawsuits, Clairemont and the current one brought by several towns. In both cases the State Supreme Court ruled the State does not provide adequate funding and in the latest case the Court decided that the real cost was nearly twice what the State provides. The State's response was to

32 appeal the decision. The State is bleeding the Education Trust Fund to pay for the  
33 Education Freedom Accounts. That will downshift more cost to local communities. In  
34 2024 the EFA program cost \$24 million removed from the Trust Fund. There are multiple  
35 problems with this: First, the amount provided is totally inadequate to pay the entire cost  
36 of private school, so if you can't make up the substantial difference then it does you no  
37 good; Second, the parameters of what can be taught in a private school are very loose,  
38 to the point that there aren't really standards at all; Third, the net effect of diverting these  
39 funds to private schools means the State can't move them to the public schools to help  
40 offset local taxes. There is a movement at the State level to remove any income caps  
41 from the program, the rich benefit the most, those who can't afford private schools are  
42 the ones who get hurt the most as the public schools are being starved of State funds. If  
43 you want your local taxes to go down, you must change things at the State level.

44 The next speaker was **D. J. Garcia** from Wilton a member of the Wilton town budget committee,  
45 chairman of the Wilton Select Board, and an eight-year veteran of multiple town positions. He  
46 explained that the tax rate reflects items approved by our town last year. He shared his difficult  
47 experiences in setting the current tax rate. When we as a town guaranteed the wages that were  
48 justified and expected, the only way to make up for these increases is to cut programs that  
49 affect students' ability to learn. He found there was \$48K in the budget for paper products. He  
50 suggested that because we are paying our teachers a proper salary, they should no longer  
51 receive professional development services (outside forces) and the teachers provide more  
52 services. Don't take money from services that are directly impacting the students. There are  
53 professional services throughout every school that he feels could be done in house. He  
54 suggested electrical budget items should be reevaluated. If we don't make our budget flat or  
55 lower it, and not vote down all warrant articles, there will be tax increases next year.

56 The next speaker was **Mike Belantrom** from Wilton. He stated that his taxes are unaffordable  
57 and he's anticipating leaving New Hampshire because working class people cannot afford this.  
58 He works in Massachusetts because the salaries in New Hampshire are too low.

59 The next speaker was **Jennifer Gagnon** (online) who asked D.J. Garcia about the Kingbrook  
60 bridge project that was not on the agenda. D. J. Garcia was allowed to respond.

## 61 **Committee Activity**

Chair Jones introduced the next agenda item: the approval of the previous minutes. Jonathon Vanderhoof makes the motion to approve the minutes of November 5<sup>th</sup>, 2024. Bridget Mooney seconded the motion. Bill Ryan abstained. All other present members voted aye.

Jonathon Vanderhoof made the motion to approve the minutes of November 19<sup>th</sup>, 2024. Bill Ryan seconded the motion. All ayes.

Next agenda item is a reminder for members of the public who wish to run for open school board or school budget committee positions to file with Mary Jane at the SAU office between January 22<sup>nd</sup> and January 31<sup>st</sup> 2025.

Deborah Delworth from Wilton was introduced as a candidate for an open Wilton position on the school budget committee. After some discussion about who votes on this issue, (only Wilton members can vote for this Wilton vacancy) a motion was made by Bill Ryan to accept her nomination to fill the vacant school budget committee until the next election in March 2025. It was seconded by Jennifer Bernet. Jeff, Jennifer, Michelle, Bill and Bridget all voted aye. The motion passed. Deb joined the committee at the table although she was not sworn in at that time and therefore did not participate in any votes.

Chair Jones asked if the committee was ready to vote on the operating budget at this time. Jonathan Vanderhoof queried the committee to see if another review was warranted. Jennifer suggested we take time for Deb, the new member, to learn the new budget and vote later. A decision was made to delay the vote until January 2025.

Kristi LaPlante verified to Jonathan Vanderhoof that there is only one copy of the budget and it is posted online at <https://sau63.org> under the budget committee link. The proposed increase in draft number three is \$658,017 which is a 4.42% increase over the approved 2025 operating budget from last year.

Peter Weaver said that with the budget at 4.42% increase we need to cut three positions. One is a classroom aid paraeducator, one is a teaching position at FRES and the third is a teaching position at WLC. We've also taken four positions and reduced them from full time to part time and that includes one administrative position. We are going to have to look at staffing and understand the effects on students, if we are looking at additional cuts, they will affect staffing.

Jonathon Vanderhoof brought up the summer school program. He feels that the summer school funding has vastly expanded over the past three years. He also feels there could be reductions in this program. Peter Weaver described its funding. Peter Weaver and Bridgette Fowler plan to

look at the impacts of the summer program on student learning. Kristi Laplante further discussed the funding of the summer program: \$2,700.00 is budgeted. They are looking at cutting some of the programs and securing federal grants for some others. The title one funds support additional learning in Math and Science and are not specific to the summer program. There has been a severe cut in federal support, and this impacts our summer program.

Jonathan Vanderhoof questioned the professional development of staff. Kristi Lapante said that it is used for software training and the credit received in 2024 for this training is not guaranteed going forward.

Jonathan suggests we should look at the entire budget and see if there are areas that need adjustment. Chair Jones asked Peter Weaver to come back with the costs of the summer program and how it affects taxes. Chair Jones asked if there are other areas to consider. Michelle Alley asked if there has been further discussion of transportation. Jeff Jones believes we will defer van and bus purchase and leasing issues until next year. There is more work to do on this issue. Peter Weaver indicated that our short term goal is to use the busing we've already contracted. Peter Weaver explained the bussing issue. In the long term we need to work as a district to solve transportation issues. Our contract with Butler bus ends after this year. There is frustration that there is only one bidder on transportation contracts.

Jonathan Vanderhoof said the floor scrubber which is on the facilities "line" sounds like it is an in-kind replacement. If we added some money we could get an upgraded machine that would save expenses. He asked the administration for numbers on that machine so that we know how much to add.

**Warrant articles.** The school board approved two in their last meeting. The SRO was approved in concept but not in cost at the school board meeting. The budget committee cannot vote on this now. Regardless it will move forward to the tax payers for their vote. Warrant article number five for capital improvement is \$275,000.00 for buildings and roadways which was approved by the school board. The same amount as last year for the CIP. Jonathan Vanderhoof wonders why there funds in the CIP that are unassigned.

Chair Jones asked the committee and the public to look at the CIP and find earmarked projects and planned funding and for the budget committee to vote on these items at the next meeting.

122 Chair Jones asked if there are committee members who want to work with Mr. Jones to assist  
123 with the development of the Operating Budget presentation. Jonathan Vanderhoof and Deb  
124 Delworth volunteered.

125 Bill Ryan mentioned the transportation issue and asked for direction for the transportation  
126 contractor.

127 Jonathan Vanderhoof suggested we all meet and go through the budget line-by-line.

128 Chair Jones asked if there is a consensus on the budget. The consensus is that the budget has  
129 been cut as much as possible at this time. (There may be a few tens of thousands of dollars that  
130 could be cut, but they are relatively insignificant in comparison to the actual amount of the  
131 budget.)

132 Chair Jones calls for second public comment session.

133 The first speaker is **Sarah Spittle** from Wilton. She commended Jonathan on his clarity and  
134 suggested if the committee can find, even small cuts, do them.

135 The second speaker was **Julie Lemire** from Wilton, a teacher at FRES. She asked if any  
136 money was returned to the town at the end of the fiscal year. Jeff Jones said there was a vote to  
137 retain \$100,000.00 for the capital reserve fund. Kristi LaPlante indicated at \$231,556.00 was  
138 returned.

139 Ms. Lemire said that you will find that teachers are very generous in what they will spend on  
140 their students. She is very sad that our school is not being depicted in a positive light either  
141 online or just in the community. And there is the false suggestion that our students are not  
142 doing well academically. She emphasized that our teachers are working very hard and some of  
143 them are working second and third jobs.

144 The third speaker was **D. J. Garcia** from Wilton. He clarified that our teachers needn't pay for  
145 toilet paper, but, instead they should assume the heavy lift of professional development and not  
146 rely on outside resources. SRO: what will Lyndeborough's contribution be? His third issue was  
147 returned funds to the town. Has the entire budget been expended? He urged inspection of the  
148 overspent lines. He believes line items should be inspected. He urges us to look harder.

149 Kristi Laplante addressed D. J.'s concerns.

The fourth speaker was **Tatiana Franko**. She said “the town’s people” would like a budget freeze and that in the next four years the economy will do much better and our money will have more value.

**Mary Golding** (online) Wilton. She thanked the Budget Committee and the Administration and commended their hard work. Students are doing well. Teachers are amazing. She encourages people to vote for the budget.

The chair readdressed D. J. Garcia’s SRO issue and it can be investigated the next school board issue on December 17<sup>th</sup> at LCS.

The next meeting for the school budget committee is set for Tuesday January 14<sup>th</sup>, 2025, at 6:30 PM at WLC. Jonathan Vanderhoof made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Michelle Alley seconded the motion. All ayes.

Meeting adjourned at 8:03 PM EST.

Respectfully submitted, Bridget Mooney, Secretary