

Communications Committee Meeting Minutes March 4, 2016

Present: Deirdre d'Albertis, Laura Schulkind, Deirdre Burns, Tom Burnell, Steve Jensen, Joe Phelan, Steve Jenkins (RSF), Jen Hammoud (RSF), Andy Schulkind (RSF), Debbi Mimoso (PTSO), Sarah Hutchings (PTSO)

The Committee invited representatives from the PTSO and the Rhinebeck Science Foundation to the meeting to alert them to this year's budget development process and challenges. Joe began the meeting by sharing the process in developing the budget generally and, more specifically, over the past couple of months. He reviewed the various elements that come into play as we calculate expenditures and expected revenues. Joe explained how the tax levy cap is calculated and the impact of the cap in past years and this year. Joe shared with those present that we are facing a budget gap of over \$800,000 dollars and that, while we expect that to be narrowed to some degree, we anticipate making budget cuts. As well, Joe shared that the Board is considering presenting a budget to the voters that would pierce the tax levy cap. Joe also briefed the group on the Gap Elimination Adjustment.

Various members of both organizations asked questions and shared helpful comments including:

- * It may be valuable to share with the community the history of tax levy cap increases in order to illustrate that a 2% tax levy increase this year aligns with increases from past budgets.
- * The committee was reminded that the PTSO does not endorse votes for or against passage of the budget but does make calls reminding parents to vote. It was suggested that they can also help share budget information with their membership. If the district created a document that outlines some of the key issues this year, the PTSO could circulate it. They could also circulate among their membership any key statewide legislative issues that are relevant.
- * It was recommended that the district post to the web site information on what budget cuts are being considered, so the community can evaluate the consequences of budget proposals under consideration.
- * It was suggested that, perhaps after the budget vote, it could be valuable to bring together a coalition of community members to discuss the future of the district and strategize over how to communicate the value of our schools to the larger community.
- * It was noted that the RSF also does not take a position on passage of school budgets but is another important venue for communication with parents.

The committee expressed its thanks to the representatives present for taking the time to attend the meeting and share their questions, ideas and perspectives.

After the PTSO and RSF members departed the meeting, the committee discussed:

- * The need for long term planning around declining enrollment. Perhaps a summer workshop or other method of addressing the long term impact of lower enrollment, rather than addressing it year to year at budget time. Deirdre d'A. has collected some information from other communities who have had to address this issue. Perhaps there are models out there we can learn from. Maintaining a positive school environment under stressful budgets and population declines is a concern.
- * The committee expressed support for the idea of creating a coalition/task force to bring people together to talk about the future of our schools. The committee needs to give the specifics of this more consideration.
- * Immediate issues: we need to get information to the community - key budget issues, key legislative issues, cuts under consideration. Laura generously agreed to take a pass at an FAQ about the budget that we could post and share with community groups. Committee members are to consider what questions may be useful and to pass along ideas to Laura. Joe will post budget information, including cuts under consideration, after the workshop when those cuts have been prioritized and there is greater clarity on the direction the board is going. Tom is working on a historical analysis of the tax impact of various levies on a median priced home in in the district.

Respectfully submitted by Deirdre Burns