

**TOWN OF LAKEVILLE**  
**Selectmen's Meeting Minutes**  
**February 26, 2015 - 1:00 PM**

On February 26, 2015, the Board of Selectmen held a meeting at 1:00 PM at the Council on Aging Building in Lakeville. The meeting was called to order by Chairman Powderly at 1:36 PM. Selectmen present were: Selectman Powderly, Selectman Burke and Selectman Hollenbeck. Also present were: Rita Garbitt, Town Administrator, and Christine Weston, Recording Secretary. LakeCAM was recording the meeting for local broadcast.

**Regional School FY16 Budget Forum presented by Superintendent Richard Medeiros and Fred Baker, Director of Finance Operations and Human Resources**

*Also present were Richard Medeiros, School Superintendent and Michael Petruzzo, Chairman of the Lakeville Finance Committee. Fred Baker was not present for the discussion.* Chairman Powderly stated that this is the first meeting the Board of Selectmen are having with the Superintendent regarding the FY16 School Budget. He noted that in a February 24, 2015 Standard Times Article, the Freetown Selectmen stated that they would be meeting with the Lakeville Selectmen and Finance Committee and the Freetown Finance Committee on March 2<sup>nd</sup> at 7:00 PM to discuss what Lakeville would be giving to the School Budget. The Freetown Selectmen are recommending that Freetown fund the Region's FY16 budget at the minimum level required by the State. Chairman Powderly said the FY16 preliminary budget is \$34,810,275, which is a 1.4% increase over the previous year. Paul Sadeck, Freetown Selectman, has stated that they did not take into consideration salary negotiations, and to him it misleads the people. Chairman Powderly said he did not see using Excess & Deficiency (E&D) money to offset the budget as a proper move. Without using the offsets (Circuit Breaker \$425,000, School Choice \$175,000 and E & D \$300,000) it is a 4% increase prior to offsets and any negotiations with steps, levels and wage increases.

Chairman Powderly expressed his concern about the student decline of 432 students over a period of years. He asked if anything has been done to find out where the students are going and why they left. Mr. Medeiros stated that the information has not been gathered yet. He would also like to know at what grade students are leaving. He did not feel that the Region was losing the students to Catholic or private schools. The declining enrollment figures will have an impact as the final budget proposal is presented. Chairman Powderly stated that in 2010 there were 201 teachers, but only 187 in 2014. He felt that the job descriptions were confusing in designation. What is a paraprofessional and what is a teacher? Mr. Medeiros is reporting 32 less teachers in 2010, and this is perplexing. Mr. Medeiros responded that he is also confused with that. It seems that different standards have been used. He has used the same classifications that the Region has reported to the State. The problem was that different Administrators have classified them differently. That is the fairest and most consistent way to look at it. Mr. Medeiros stated that he has done these reports before in other districts. This may be different than his predecessors, but it is consistent and shows the pattern. Chairman Powderly stated that even with that information, he does not understand why the figures are off by 30 teachers. Mr. Medeiros stated that it is just that they did it differently.

Chairman Powderly stated that capital improvements , if it has a useful life greater than five (5) years, should not be part of the operating budget; it should be borrowed money. Regarding School Choice, Mr. Medeiros seems to be the first Superintendent that actually is a proponent of School Choice. Chairman Powderly said if we did lose 420 students over the years, he is sure that we could replace hundreds of them from other communities. Someone may criticize our school systems, but they are better than others. We do not want the public to think that we are increasing the budget only 1.4% when you are not. The steps and levels have been left in the operating budget, and did not include the raises. With the steps and levels for a teacher during their first 12 years of employment, they receive almost a 5% increase per year for 12 years, plus the 2% raise that is in the current year. Some teachers are getting a 7% raise in FY15. The Town employees get less than 2.5%, and that includes steps and levels. Chairman Powderly said this number is beyond his comprehension. He asked the Superintendent if there were class size calculations for Grades 9-12. We seem to only focus in public on the class sizes that are too big, and not on the ones that are too small. We need to understand teacher to student ratios and Chairman Powderly does not. In regards to contractual obligations, steps and levels, why are they in the budget since it should be negotiated. Mr. Medeiros responded that one contract negotiation has been settled. Mr. Medeiros responded that there are assumptions of carrying over current negotiations that exist, but assumptions were not made with the upcoming negotiations. Steps and levels can change.

Mr. Medeiros stated that the budget he presented was 1.4% with offsets. He has previously worked in two (2) other Regional School Districts. Towns should look at what their assessment is, not the budget, to determine what it takes to educate their students. He was not disagreeing that the contractual obligations are in place, but the negotiation figures are not. No one is disputing the decline in enrollment. He would refute staffing, but it is not a comparable decline. For School Choice, it has been said to bring in more revenue or shut things down. We are running a business. He does take a conservative approach with School Choice. He would like to maintain and continue to expand on it. People need to be aware of the fact that once someone comes into the Region through School Choice, you own them for the duration of their education. He doesn't think it is a long term strategy to include E & D with School Choice, but we had over \$1 million in that account, and we need to look at what number makes sense. Mr. Medeiros said that he inherited that, and this year we are incorporating some money in from E & D. Capital needs for FY16 include the track and tennis court, which is considered separate. In his experience, there is usually an operational assessment and capital assessment account, but there is a line item in the budget that he inherited which is being used for the wastewater treatment plant. He has continued on with the current budget format. There has been discussion about expanding some projects, but he does not see that as sustainable. One item is the pool, and he did not think that was appropriate.

Mr. Medeiros stated that more than half of the employees in the bargaining units are on the top step, so that figure is not accurate for all. It is unfair to say that everyone is getting 7% raises when it is less than half. Chairman Powderly commented that if it is half, then the budget for steps and levels would go up 3.5% and we take in 2.5% a year. Mr. Medeiros stated that he presented a budget a month ago inheriting skewed steps and levels. He was still able to present a budget with no lay-offs of teachers, while maintaining programs and services. We have a course syllabus that shows how many students are in each course that can be provided for review. The

Region needs to improve and increase its course offerings, like those of advanced placement, however, they are not the average class sizes. It is what the two (2) communities feel are important. That is why the breakdown was provided as it was. It was not intended to be misleading. It is a common practice on how they are grouped. It is true that class discussion is usually based on class numbers that are too high; typically that is in the elementary grades. We will not comment on full day Kindergarten at this time. Mr. Medeiros said he has proposed full day Kindergarten with no payment to the School Committee, but they have not made a decision. He felt that realistically an increase of 2.3% of the total budget is a conservative number. That included the capital projects, salaries, and technology.

Chairman Powderly stated that it is not his goal to reduce services, but to make sure that the teachers are being refocused on raising the bar. Without raising costs can we do that? We should expand the classes that we feel are important. Mr. Medeiros stated that a budget has been presented to the School Committee with the idea that there will be some ability to adjust those numbers which falls within that number. The School Committee is to look at the programming and staffing and what the towns can support. Ultimately they will have to make decisions. Chairman Powderly stated that he wants to get behind the numbers and the budget, but he needs to understand the fact that more Advanced Placement classes will be created and that there is the staff to do that. If we need to hire more staff to do that, then it is hard to wrap our arms around it. Mr. Medeiros agreed. He had been the one to present those numbers with declining enrollment. He is trying to address some capital needs, since there was no plan, so now in a short time, a multi-year plan is hoped to put into place. How we go about funding that is a different issue.

Selectman Burke stated that first focusing on the assessment and not the budget is a good way to look at it. There is a tendency to dive in, and there are a lot of decisions for the School Committee to make. When he was on the School Committee, the Selectmen would cross the line and critique the budget. Selectman Burke said he believes in the process. Chairman Powderly's comments are not warranted, although he appreciates what Chairman Powderly is saying. However, it is the School Committee's decision, if they put a 1.4% raise budget forward with one time money or E & D offsets. A taxpayer may have a critique about that, but it is a decision for the School Committee to make. Originally the School Choice vote was limited to Grades 6 and 9. However, that was five (5) to six (6) years ago. Many districts do it in that manner. These students need to be driven to school, and that is a commitment from the parents. Selectman Burke commented on the assumption that seems to be being made with Regional Transportation and 9C cuts. It is not known if there will be 9C cuts. The contractual obligations have yet to be determined is another factor. Hopefully we can arrive at a point where it keeps that status. Mr. Medeiros responded that his experience is to include the obligations or assume the responsibility to include it, so that you do not go back after the fact. Build it in or work with it; it is an assumption that is there. Selectman Burke reviewed page 2 of the binder information that had been provided. The \$26,000 for legal expenses is being pointed out for consistency. Mr. Medeiros noted that though the anticipated cost is higher for this year, it is showing only \$26,000 for FY16. Selectman Burke stated that class size is important with the delivery of services. We, as a town, had an override a few years ago, and class size was the focus of why it occurred. We want to stay focused on why that took place, and to make sure all classes are of reasonable size, specifically elementary school sizes. Selectman Burke stated that he is in

support of full day Kindergarten. Mr. Medeiros stated that he thinks that the School Committee will take action on that topic next week since parents have to be informed.

Selectman Hollenbeck said that five (5) teacher retirees have not been replaced. That is going to offset the additional increases also. At the last Budget Finance Subcommittee Meeting, there were some suggestions on substitution alternate items, not in addition to the budget. There had been a motion and a second that was then retracted regarding the teacher coaches. That is about \$300,000 of salary costs as a potential alternative to adding additional teachers to reduce class size. She looked at major cost increases to see if maybe there was the ability to reduce in other areas. The capital projects are estimated at approximately \$1 million. There is the waste water treatment issue that sticks out also. There are \$300,000 of capital projects in the current budget that conceivably will not be in the budget the following year. That is part of the plan to address longer term financing options to help offset increases on March 11<sup>th</sup>. We will discuss in Executive Session some of what has transpired in negotiations. She has the final numbers from the past few years and can show that. Health insurance will also be another item addressed. Selectman Hollenbeck said it appears the FY15 budget will have a positive surplus. The total increase to the budget can be looked at to see if there are any areas to reduce it, and keep it at a sustainable level this year.

Mr. Medeiros explained that the Region has almost 400 employees with a \$34 million dollar budget. He has shared with the Board some of the items he has discussed with the School Committee. The budget is coming a bit more into place and will continue over the next few weeks. Chairman Powderly said he would support as many teachers as can be afforded, not to lay any off, but if there are underutilized teachers, then help them to refocus or use different teachers. Mr. Medeiros stated that he wants to look at existing staffing. The class size numbers are not extreme, though not ideal, but generally consistent Elementary wise. The Middle School does have higher class sizes than what is felt to be typical, especially in the specialty areas. The High School is a different story. Coaches are part of the Teacher Association, and we are looking at that to see if that is a focus or not. With the full day Kindergarten proposal, we did not really add two (2) teachers, since there had been a retirement at a different grade level. The numbers are pretty clear. There has been declining enrollment, and he has been told that companies are coming in, and the schools will see a population increase. The current numbers do not show this though. Capital projects are included in the budget, but we need to answer some questions first on their status. Chairman Powderly asked if the \$300 athletics fee is comparable to what other school districts charge? Mr. Medeiros responded that it is comparable. He is not a supporter of user fees for athletics, but those times are now changing. Chairman Powderly stated that he wants to make sure the district is charging enough. Mr. Medeiros explained that it is the facilities that need to be looked at, which have been neglected.

Richard LaCamera of 32 Old Powderhouse Road asked if anyone has looked at the births in the last five (5) to eight (8) years, since they are down half of what they used to be. Looking at that trend, it will be down even more. Regarding the Kindergarten and Elementary levels, that is the key on what the future really is. With School Choice, he felt that it is a terrible mistake if done at the Elementary level. The School Choice matter has died off, and people are not interested in it. The \$175,000 being used to offset the budget for School Choice, is that the 60 students we have? Mr. Medeiros responded that the amount received is \$5,000 per student.

School Choice is limited to particular grades right now, and it does include some at the Elementary level. Discussion for clarification took place between Mr. LaCamera and Mr. Medeiros regarding the account for School Choice, and what the State allows each year and what it can and cannot be used to offset.

Mr. LaCamera asked why the E & D account has been over \$1 million for the past two (2) years. Mr. Medeiros responded that it is not anticipated to be in the current year. The accumulation may have taken place over multiple years. Selectman Hollenbeck provided some explanation about the account. There had been a school lunch closeout that went into the E & D account of approximately \$20,000. Mr. LaCamera asked if the retirees funds were still in the budget. Mr. Medeiros explained that it has been moved to other areas. Mr. LaCamera asked if the \$300,000 for the coaches was still in the budget. Mr. Medeiros responded that it is. Mr. LaCamera stated that there is then \$700,000 of monies remaining, yet the budget is still going up a significant amount. Selectman Hollenbeck noted that the District will be losing money for full day Kindergarten the first year, which will be picked up the second year. Mr. LaCamera asked what grade levels the retirements are in.? Mr. Medeiros explained that it is all three (3) levels. Mr. LaCamera noted that there is approximately 400 staff and about 190 are teachers, so are there that many other employees. Mr. Medeiros stated that the figure does include custodians and all other employees. Mr. LaCamera stated that regarding the technology piece, the Town passed an override for \$900,000; has it been all spent. Mr. Medeiros responded that there is \$7,000 left, of the \$903,000. It has been spent to address the first three (3) phases of the technology plan. Mr. LaCamera stated that he gets confused on what is in the budget or not. It seems that there is a lot undecided, if it will be in there or not, and that is not fair to the taxpayer.

Mr. Medeiros stated that it needs to be determined if class size is the priority. Selectman Burke stated that full day Kindergarten educationally is a positive, whether it can be sustained or not moving forward, it depends. 88% of the State has full day Kindergarten. Mr. LaCamera stated that Regionalization cost \$500,000, plus \$1.5 million for the override and \$900,000 for technology. The number one (1) priority was class size, and to reduce special education costs and transportation. We need to get things going in the right direction. The two previous Superintendents presented material that never got implemented. So what is the right factor for the future of the school district? Chairman Powderly stated that that is why discussion about the High School numbers needs to take place. If a teacher is needed in second grade, the teacher should come from the High School. We should shift the teachers rather than hire additional teachers and refocus on the elementary level.

Joe Abbaticola of 23 Long Point Road said all we hear is that if we Regionalize, class sizes will go down, and the amount of school buses will go down. My grandson moved into town yesterday and there are about 22 students in his classroom now, and next year it is projected as 24. Is that with one (1) teacher? Mr. Medeiros responded that the Elementary configuration usually has one (1) teacher per class. Mr. Abbaticola asked how you have so many students in the Elementary Schools and then they disappear in the upper grades. Do they go to Old Colony? Can we take some teachers and bring them down from the upper grade levels? Mr. Medeiros explained that it is rationale that enrollment is down, and it needs to be determined if we are maximizing the current staff.

Mr. Medeiros stated that the budget number was a sustainable figure. If the Towns invest in this, then it will continue. The real criticism is what is the real plan? An investment was made during his predecessors terms. Now, we are asking for more money. There was no text book inventory when he asked for it. So how does he convince people to buy more books, when we do not have an inventory? He has that now, and it is reflected in the budget.

### **Adjournment**

Upon a motion made by Selectman Burke; seconded by Selectman Hollenbeck it was:

VOTED: To adjourn the Selectmen's Meeting at 3:23 PM.  
Unanimous in favor.

### **List of documents provided at the February 26, 2015 Selectmen Meeting**

1. Freetown-Lakeville Regional School District FY16 Budget 2-26-15
2. Article from Standard Times 2-24-15 (referred to)
3. Article from Standard Times 2-6-15 (referred to)