

**THE ANNUAL SCHOOL DISTRICT MEETING IS BEING HELD THIS FRIDAY
MARCH 13TH
AT 7 PM IN THE Bow HIGH SCHOOL AUDITORIUM**

This is where those present will vote on school expenses for 2009-2010

Here are the issues as I see them.

Warrant Article 3 is the total operating expenditures.

Key Element is the declining enrollment due to several factors including: low birth rates, high housing cost (including taxes) making Bow unaffordable to families with children and the sharp decline in new building permits over the past decade. This decline in enrollment will force Bow to find tuition paying students from other school districts in the very near future. This effort will either be hampered or assisted by the per pupil cost. It cost over \$14,000 per year to educate each child in the Bow school system

Key Decision - is it appropriate to maintain the current administrative and educational staffing positions given the actual and projected decline in student enrollment. The board decided this year to reduce class size from 17 to 14 in the 1st and 2ed grades rather than layoff 2 teachers. The state standard is 25 students per class.

Budget summary: The school says the proposed budget is a slight decrease but in order to get there they had to include \$330,000 that they never spent on health insurance. You may remember the press release right after the budget was approved last year saying the school board had been provided with grossly inaccurate health insurance estimates and that in fact the cost would be \$330,000 less the budgeted. If you take out the extra \$330,000 the proposed budget is actually an increase of a little over \$100,000.

Warrant Article 4 is the teacher's salary:

Key Elements: Are Bow's current teacher salaries competitive in the market and the new "NEW EVERGREEN CLAUSE".

Below is a chart that compares the CURRENT Bow average teacher salary to the State average teacher salary. Bow pays about 11% higher then the average. This does not include benefits.

The Proposed Salary Increase Facts - The teachers negotiated a one year contract that is advertised as 2.25%. Actually the salary increase is 3.64% because of automatic raises. Besides the salary increase the teachers also receive an automatic "step" increase for each year they are employed. However eventually the steps run out (I believe it is a decade or more) after which time they receive periodic automatic "longevity" increase. Step and longevity are added to any increase in base pay.

The NEW EVERGREEN CLAUSE - This is a new clause that applies to any union contract. It says that if the voters pass this contract the step and longevity increases remain in effect for ever. Thus if the union and the School Board fail to reach a new contract and the old contract expires the portions of the contract that require automatic step and longevity increase must be paid. That

is paid even if there is no contract. This law passed this past year by the New Hampshire House, Senate and sign by the Governor. Many have identified this as a payback to unions for their support at election time.

Warrant Article 5 is the second bite at the apple warrant. To see if the voters will vote to have a second school meeting this year if article 4 (the teachers raises) fails. If the voters say no the first time then the thinking is those in the minority are more motivated to show up at a second meeting and thus the raises would be more likely to pass on the second try.

Warrant articles 6, 7, and 8 – These articles are for repaving and improving Bow Elementary and Middle school's entrance (\$60,500), a new phone system (\$95,000), and a new High School track surface (\$90,000). This spending will come from the capital reserve funds. Removing these funds from the capital reserve will have the effect of a slight decrease in town revenues (these funds earn interest).

Warrant Article 9 to see if the town will approve SB2 form of voting on the school budget. More information will be provided nearer the election.

Warrant Article 10 - T to see if the town will require the school board and budget committees to show the voters the tallies (number who voted for and against) on all warrant articles. You will notice that voters do not see the number of School Board or Budget Committee members who voted for or against a warrant article.

There is always the issue of the School Boards end of the fund balance (difference between what they spent and what they brought in, including taxes and other revenues). Almost every year the school board has brought in more money then they needed to spend. With the year ending this past June it was over \$509,000 and with the year ending in a few months (June 30) the figure is estimated to be “substantially higher” then this years \$509,000. Reducing budgets by \$250,00 while maintaining year end surpluses of \$500,000 to \$1,000,000 are unacceptable in these tough economic times.

Those attending the annual school district meeting this Friday will **only get to vote on the bottom line. You do not get a vote on any line items.** Having said that I believe we can reduce the budget by a total of \$300,000 with no or little impact on the education experience if we maintain the current 1st and 2ed grade student to teacher ratios and eliminate two of the three assistant principles. That would still leave two Deans at the High School.

Editorial Comment:

Why reduce the budget?

Reducing the budget is the right thing to do and because it would have little to no impact on the quality of education provided in Bow.

Because in these economic times it is the fair thing to do for our Bow neighbors. It is unconscionable to ask home owners who are themselves struggling to pay taxes and mortgages, who have been laid off, who have taken pay and benefits reductions, who have lost their businesses or the seniors who have seen their retirement investments depreciate by more then 40% to pay more so that teachers and administrators can receive pay raises.

As always if you have any questions or comments please email or call.

Tom Keane