

School District Meeting Backs Hamp House Lease

By Lauren R. Dorgan
Concord Monitor staff

From the March 3 *Concord Monitor*

The sagging economy loomed large at the Andover School District meeting last night, where a large crowd stayed late into the night talking in often personal terms about their salaries, their tax bills, and their fears for their children.

At press time last night, meeting-goers had neither voted on the \$4.2 million proposed budget nor debated what to do about a volunteer-run after-school program that the school board has proposed to stop giving space to in the district-owned Hamp House. The Hamp House controversy spurred a huge turnout at the meeting, with a couple hundred people packed into Andover Elementary/Middle School auditorium.

The meeting was often wrenching as voters pored line-by-line for more than 2½ hours through the budget. One mother nearly cried discussing the cut of a remedial reading program that had helped her son. Folks briefly debated cutting the share that Andover pays to the Merrimack Valley SAU before school board members told them the amount is mandated by contract. The school nurse and health teacher, Heather Hill, defended her \$52,000 salary that multiple audience members questioned.

Hill said she took a pay cut when she started with the school district and has gone back to school so she could get a bachelor's degree and teach health classes. Her job is demanding, she said.

"I do a whole lot more than put Band-Aids on their boo-boos," Hill said.

On the other hand, folks invoked the specter of layoffs and the creep of taxes in personal terms, with men talking about making \$30,000 a year or reeling off the size of their tax bills.

At press time, voters were considering a proposal by state Rep. Jennifer Coffey to cut about 1 percent from the budget. Coffey cited the hundreds of layoffs and foreclosures the state has seen so far in the economic downturn.

"My son's in this school district. I want him to have a good education," Coffey said. "But I want him to have a roof over his head. ... What I'm trying to do is I'm trying to find any dime," she said, to make taxes "a touch less painful."

Deana Crucitti noted that difficult cuts had already been made by the time the budget came to voters, like the reading recovery program that had helped her son. She said that she, too, feels pressure on her wallet, but that education is not the place to cut.

"They're going to have to answer to our financial decisions for the rest of their lives," Crucitti said.

The reading recovery program was pared back from \$26,391 to zero dollars in the budget presented to voters last night. Jim Danforth asked whether there would be long-term costs.

"I'd like to know what you think

the long-term costs are going to be," Danforth said. "I'd like some assurance."

Armand Boisvert, the owner of the bus company that had served the school district for more than 20 years, defended taking a contract that hadn't gone out to bid each year, saying "you're getting a hell of a buy" for about \$220,000 a year and he would not renew next year.

Boisvert, whose son Douglas Boisvert is chairman of the school board, said he'd heard a lot of complaints that the town had been run by "the good old boys club for a long time," he said. That, he said, was a "major advantage for the town," he said, because "I'm not making any money on it."

Other speakers said that the town had taken its contract to Boisvert after running into problems with other, more expensive bus companies that ran late or left kids in Salisbury to be picked up. Merrimack Valley School District Superintendent Michael Martin said that, gauging by the school district's experience, Boisvert's company offers "an extremely good price."

The budget, as proposed by the school board and budget committee, would increase Andover's school tax rate to \$11.73 per \$1,000 in assessed property value, or about 7.3 percent, according to budget committee Chairman Ed Hiller. Much of that increase, Hiller said, came from two previously negotiated contracts: One for the cost of sending Andover's high schoolers to Merrimack Valley, which is up about \$190,000, and one to serve out the existing teachers contract, which amounts to a \$95,000 increase.

Hiller said his group didn't have much room to cut. As it is, the budget cuts one teacher position and three support staffers.

Copyright © 2009 *Concord Monitor*

By Karen Langley
Concord Monitor staff

From the March 4 *Concord Monitor*

An Andover after-school program is likely to remain in the Hamp House after residents voted Monday to extend its lease.

SEUFERT LAW P.A.

Auto Accidents • Injuries
Criminal • DWI • Bankruptcy
Worker's Comp
Lead Paint Poisoning
Insurance Denials

Christopher J. Seufert, Esquire
Brad C. Davis, Esquire
William L. Egge, Esquire

www.seufertlaw.com

59 Central Street
Franklin Concord
934-9837 224-8672

WE'LL GET YOU
THROUGH IT®

The Andover School Board had decided in December against renewing the 10-year lease, set to expire in July, citing building concerns and a desire to collect rent for the district-owned property. The board had never billed the program for its \$1 yearly rent or utilities.

Voters at the annual school district meeting last night raised their voices in support of an article directing the school board to change course and allow the program to stay on the school property. School board Chairman Douglas Boisvert said he expects the board will now move to extend the lease.

"It would be foolhardy for the board not to enter into a lease when the people of the district have asked us to," Boisvert said yesterday.

Bonny Morris, who chairs the volunteer-run organization, said the program had gathered 225 signatures in less than two weeks to place the petition article on the warrant. She said the vote showed strong community support for the program, which serves 33 elementary school students, including half-day kindergartners.

"People are realizing the immeasurable benefits having an after-school program provides the community," she said. "And people feel very strongly and identify the Hamp House as an asset."

Discussion of the article lasted at least an hour, raising emotions and help-

ing push the meeting past midnight.

The school board will form a committee to decide the terms of a new lease, Boisvert said. The program has already agreed to replace shingles and reinforce the building's snow load capacity.

The board will also ask the program to pay rent, Boisvert said. A tax assessment firm hired by the town has said the Hamp House has an above-average quality of construction, Morris said.

After voting to extend the lease on the Hamp House, residents turned down another petition article that sought to raze the building.

The proposed annual operating budget of \$4.2 million passed without amendment. The new budget will raise the school district tax rate 80 cents, said Ed Hiller, chairman of Andover's budget committee.

Voters also authorized the district to raise \$60,000 to renovate the Andover Elementary/Middle School gymnasium by removing tiles containing asbestos and installing energy-efficient windows. Neither the school board nor the budget committee had recommended the article, which passed by a ballot vote of 69-56, Hiller said. After the passage of the new operating budget and the renovations, the estimated school district tax rate will be \$11.95 per \$1,000 in valuation, he said.

Copyright © 2009 *Concord Monitor*

I'm looking for a home
with a sense of humor :-)



CASEY
FAMILY
SERVICES

Consider Foster or Adoptive Parenting
Call Casey • Change a Life

800.417.7375
www.caseyfamilyservices.org