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ward health insurance costs than before. It does not give percentage raises, but rather “step increases” of fixed amounts for length of service, which Kent characterized as “a reward for stability” and in line with a long-range goal of the school community.

Kent then reviewed trends since 2006, including sharp increases in expenses due to many emergency requirements for the physical plant and a lot of badly-needed maintenance and upgrades. The School Board kept the budget under control in that period through staff reductions; it reduced trust fund contributions, saving \$100,000 per year; and it maintained kindergarten through eighth grade accreditation rather than having a Junior High accreditation, which would mean adding foreign languages, shop class, social sciences, etc.

Kent cited a sharp increase in student population since the low point, but said the School Board has resisted budget increases, avoiding costs of about \$223,000 per year. That includes having lost eight or nine staff positions through attrition and not replacing them. Over the seven years, Kent said the School Board has achieved cost avoidance of over \$2 million, despite the continued trend of decreasing state and federal dollars.

“But just because we tell the feds to spend less money, that doesn’t mean the need goes away,” he said. Instead, it puts increased pressure on the local

community. The pressure comes from continued increases in minimal education standards and the need for technology instruction, support, and training.

“If Proctor weren’t helping us with computers all the time and not charging us, we probably would have spent another quarter of a million dollars on technology,” he said. “It’s a different world today. We’ve got to stop looking in the rearview mirror to see where the heck we’re going.”

The School Board’s recommended budget amount for Article 4 seeks to replace one of the staff lost over the years in order to deal with a 12% increase in student population. Kent said that was needed to avoid violating the state standard of 30 students per classroom and our local, historical standard of 25.

He outlined proactive steps the Board would like to take to chart budget expectations 10 to 20 years into the future: plan for the maintenance and sustainability of the school buildings; plan for the increased educational demands of the future; and anticipate student population trends.

A pie chart showed where the school budget goes: about half to kindergarten through eighth grade education; about a quarter to MVHS education; about an eighth to student support (social, health); and the final eighth to special education.

Kent wrapped up with a list of the risks of not supporting the educational needs of the community:

- Classroom overcrowding

- Reduced educational quality
- Andover students at disadvantage entering high school
- Kindergarteners at a disadvantage entering first grade
- Reduced athletic, field trip programs
- Staff retention and stability efforts undermined
- School Board legal, policy, and reporting obligations at risk
- Student counseling and health services neglected
- Economic attractiveness of Andover and its potential for growth in peril

Discussion on the motion to consider the School Board’s budget figure rather than the Budget Committee’s continued:

Andy Guptill took exception to two things Kent had said. The school is not our only municipal asset, he pointed out. The Town roads and our two fully-equipped fire stations are also major assets. And the impact of passing the higher budget and all the other articles on the School District warrant is not just 50¢ cents a day. It’s a \$273 increase on a \$200,000 home.

Paul Currier: “The excellence of the school should not be sacrificed in an effort to control costs. The School Board has done their job and pinched every penny.”

Janet Moore, an educator: “I would be willing to pay that increase in taxes, because it’s not about us now; it’s about our kids, their kids. It’s about the future. Who’s going to be in charge of me in 20 years? Who’s going to be in charge of you? It’s going to be all our kids. I urge you to vote for this amendment.”

Arch Weathers, who said he appeared to be the only member of the Andover Budget Committee present, spoke to the difference between what the Budget Committee recommends and what the School Board recommends. He cited the recommended 9% Town budget increase as something much on the Budget Committee members’ minds and pointed out that the Committee’s charge is to reconcile appropriation requests and maintain a manageable tax load.

This fourth-grade bubble in the student population started with the kindergarten class of 2009. The Committee is asking the School Board to present a plan that accommodates such bulges without the attendant spike in the school tax rate,

he said. He suggested starting a fund from which we could draw on as needed.

Arch said that the Committee considered many other questions:

Does the cost of small classes outweigh the benefits?

Will the additional teacher be experienced?

Is it better to have a small class with an inexperienced teacher or a large class with an experienced one?

Will the cost of funding an additional teacher deny funding for other educational needs?

Is there a possibility of using a retired teacher at less cost?

“One article I read made a lot of sense,” he said. Assuming it’s going to be a two-year bulge in population, the article suggests steps like setting student expectations; increasing parent-teacher conferences to perhaps weekly; increasing parent involvement, making them part of the solution; seating each student next to someone who complements his or her temperament; preparing the child at home; teaching organization, responsibility, and consequences; less TV and fewer video games; parents should stay positive, consistent, and involved.

Summing up, Arch said the Budget Committee considered many things in making its budget recommendation “in the face of too few dollars being asked to go too far.”

Kent Armstrong responded: “If any Budget Committee members had come to any of our meetings, they’d know we’ve discussed these things at length. We ask a lot of questions. We ask a lot of experts to come in and talk to us. Please come to our meetings. Those things were thoroughly vetted, and that’s how we came to our recommendations.”

The motion to amend Article 4 to the School Board’s budget recommendation rather than the Budget Committee’s recommendation passed on a voice vote. With no further discussion, the amended Article 4 passed on a voice vote, as did a motion to restrict reconsideration of the budget.

**Article 5:** To approve the cost of the collective bargaining agreement between the Andover School Board and the Andover Education Association.

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