

# School Board News Letter

## RSU 26 Spring 2018

Greetings Orono school community. The RSU 26 staff has, of course, been hard at work educating our students. The board, with the help of the superintendent and administrators, has been busy on more forward looking tasks this winter and spring. In particular a good deal of work has gone into preparing the budget for the 2018-19 school year and preparing a long-term facilities plan.

### ***Budget Participation***

Before we update you on board activities we want to remind you of two important opportunities for you to participate in the budget process. If at all possible, please participate in both!

- **Annual meeting – Tuesday May 15<sup>th</sup>, 6:00 PM Orono High School Cafeteria** (child care provided). By law and New England tradition, the entire town gathers to discuss, learn about, and ultimately approve the budget. The town can even modify the budget put forth by the board. For this reason it is important that the attendees are representative of the community as a whole and not a subset with an agenda. It usually only takes an hour to an hour and a half and is a surprisingly fun opportunity to see neighbors and feel civically engaged.
- **Budget vote – Tuesday, June 12<sup>th</sup> 7AM-8PM Orono Town Council chambers.** After the annual meeting the school budget requires an up/down vote at the ballot box. This election will also serve as the primary for important state wide races like governor and US representative.

### ***Budget update***

The budget you will see at the above two events is the results of discussion at eight public board meetings and many hours by administrators and business staff. This was a hard year to develop a budget. Despite headlines about new state money for education last July, most all of that money went to towns that were making minimal investments in the schools. Orono did not fare well in state funding this year.

According to the state funding formula, Orono's property valuations went up by \$11,500,000 and the required tax rate went from 8.19 to 8.51 mill. This resulted in an "extra" \$230,000 for the schools all to be paid for by the Orono property owners. The state contribution to Orono schools was up by only \$120,000 which did not even cover the costs of our increased student enrollments and increased special education needs. The state did not contribute anything to covering inflation or cost of living increases (\$318,000 or roughly 1.6-3.4% increases in wages for teachers with entry level teachers receiving the largest increase).

Despite the challenges, the board is proud of the budget produced. By cutting some costs, we were able to make several small investments in new areas (STEM - science, technology, engineering and math - teaching at the high school, additional teaching staff to reduce large class sizes at the middle school, and more computer technology at the elementary school), all while keeping impacts on taxpayers to a minimum. Because of the year-to-year variation in state funding on the revenue side, the district has the most control over its own expenses. The increase in total expenditures by the district is just 2.04% (below the current rate of inflation). The final impact on taxes is complex to calculate for several reasons. But by the best formula we can use, the impact on mill rate attributable to the schools should be about 0.33 mill (about \$50 for the year on a \$170,000 home with a \$20,000 homestead exemption). Tax increases due to actions of the town and county as well as due to increased value of the property would be in addition to this.

The board is proud of the final result and asks you to give it a good look and to show up and vote at the two events listed above.

## **Facilities**

The district embarked on a two year planning process to develop a long term plan for our facilities. The board appointed a 17 member facilities committee consisting of staff, administrators, board members and community members. The two board members are Brian McGill and Erin Ellis and their contact information is below. Community members include Meg Ferguson, Leo Kenney, Tom Perry, Lin White, and Geoff Wingard, We have also engaged the firm PDT Architects to help with the process. So far PDT has examined the state of maintenance in all of our buildings and conducted extensive interviews with staff, students, administrators and the board. In February we held a highly successful meeting with almost 100 members of the community where small groups discussed strengths of our schools, issues with our facilities and challenges in addressing our facilities limitations. We also hired an independent consulting firm, NESDEC, to project demographic trends in our schools. They found steady growth in enrollments the last five years and predict about 100 more students by 2028.

This spring we are working to identify shared priorities across the interviewed groups and comparing existing available space to projected educational needs. All of this work will come together into a target list of possible priority projects this spring. We are still in open-ended identification of possible needs and looking at things ranging from overdue maintenance, increased space, various improvements to existing buildings and larger improvements such as the OHS track and a performing arts center. We will work with PDT to estimate costs this summer. There will then be an extensive public prioritization and funding discussion this fall. This will lead to a final plan for work and proposed funding methods in the Spring of 2019. Possible sources for funding include “pay as you go” (annual operating funds), state revolving renovation funds and a bond. We are also exploring the possibility of obtaining the very limited state new school building funds. Any commitment of new Orono taxpayer money will be presented to a vote in Spring 2019.

We have had lots of enthusiasm, great ideas and public feedback to date. We hope this continues through Spring 2019. If you have any thoughts or questions, do not hesitate to contact the board (contact information below), the superintendent, or members of the facilities committee.

## **Calendar**

The board approved the superintendent’s recommended calendar for the 2018-19 year. You can find it on the website at <https://www.rsu26.org/2018/04/11/school-calendar-2018-2019>.

## **Who we are**

The RSU 26 board consists of five members elected by the public. One or two seats are up for election every March. You can find our contact information below. You can also find meeting agendas, minutes and video recordings of past meetings, and policies under the school board tab on the home page <http://www.rsu26.org/>. We love it when people attend board meetings (typically 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Tuesdays of the month at 6PM in the town council chambers – see website for specifics). There is a public comment period near the beginning and the end of every meeting for citizens to express their views to the board on any topic. Meetings are also live-streamed on YouTube. Please share your thoughts and concerns with the board at any time.

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