



MMUUSD Finance Committee & Community Forum MINUTES

November 16, 2023
6:00 PM

Location: Camels Hump Middle School. There was also a virtual option.

In Attendance: Lisa Pawlik, Kevin Campbell, Edye Graning, Heather Chadwick.
Administration: John Alberghini, Nicole Fortier, Jeff Wallis.

6:01 pm Chair, Lisa Pawlik called the meeting to order and reviewed the agenda.

Public comment: No public comment.

6:02 pm **2024-25 (FY25) budget priorities and information:**

Dr. Alberghini reminded all that the meeting is recorded and posted on the website for all to review. The current version of the budget is an early draft - fine tuning and analysis will continue. The Superintendent and Director of Finance, Nicole Fortier, shared the presentation linked above. In Q and A, the following points were clarified:

- Act 127 was designed to improve equity in education across Vermont by adjusting the weighting structure. More weight is given to students in, for example, poverty or ELL programs. MMU will be disadvantaged by this law and will lose revenue which will require a higher tax rate to maintain the budget.
- The budget is always developed conservatively. There will be no unnecessary additions to the MMUUSD budget this year. There will be a 5% cap on tax increases due to Act 127, per the State mandate. However, if spending per pupil increases by 10% or more districts will be subject to a review by the Secretary of Education.
- Graduating effective and engaged citizens remains a district priority. Last year the graduation rate was 96%, and the previous year 98.4%.
- Budget targets are set annually with the Finance and Facilities Committee, balancing what the district needs with what the community can support.
- At this point, staffing is consistent to mirror the relatively flat student count. Although estimated student numbers are fairly consistent into next year, student needs have increased. Three ESSER-funded positions are being absorbed by the district: two behavioral support positions and one equity coach. Cutting staff would increase pressure on those remaining, affecting safety, educational quality and morale.
- Drivers move the budget in a specific direction. There are significant increases in negotiated salaries and wages, and in health insurance premiums.
- To reduce the tax under 5% in the new weighting system for this school year (2023-24), MMUUSD would need to make cuts of \$6.5million.



6:30 pm **Review draft 1 of the FY25 budget:**

Draft #1 2024-25 Expenditure and Revenue Budget Summary

Nicole Fortier reiterated that this draft is very early in the budget development cycle, and will undergo changes. State funded revenue information is largely unknown, as are the ultimate costs of the state mandated capital projects. In Q and A, the following points were added:

- Drivers Ed - following up on a question from the last meeting - there is capacity for all juniors, but perhaps not immediately when each becomes eligible. MMUHS has more personnel support than high schools in the vicinity.
- 6.5 % is the negotiated teacher wages increase. Previous years have seen this underbudgeted, so 2.5% is being absorbed into this budget, above the 6.5%.
- Special Education expenses are flat, after some years that included notable increases. This is because last year significant amounts were budgeted for outsourcing intensive services to Howard Center, etc. These services are no longer fully available, and so MMUUSD is hiring and training internal staff. This allows for some savings.
- Regarding Capital Projects, the State will not cover any lead abatement in the water supply, or radon testing (which costs \$60K for all MMUUSD school buildings). Money is immediately available for “shovel-ready” stormwater mitigation projects, but is limited and offered on a first come first served basis.
- Tax rate comparison over recent years: the last two years saw MMUUSD’s rate go down. This was due to a state surplus. Some community members may be unaware of the fact that MMUUSD does not control the CLA which is an important variable in Vermont’s school funding formula.
- Good fiscal management plays a major part in controlling the MMUUSD budget. Before Act 127, the tax rate had been relatively flat for several years.

6:37 pm **Approve previous meeting minutes (11/09/23 meeting minutes):**

Heather Chadwick made a motion to approve the minutes, seconded by Kevin Campbell. Minutes approved.

Other business: additional discussion of budget noted above.

Meeting adjourned at 6:47 pm.

Respectfully submitted by Pat Straughan.

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