

FROM: Litchfield Budget Committee

DATE: April 23, 2018

TO: RSU4 Board of Directors

CC: Supt. Andrew Carlton
Scott Eldridge
Litchfield Budget Committee
Litchfield Board of Selectmen
Litchfield Town Manager

RE: Budget and Apportionment Considerations

Dear Directors:

On April 15, 2018 the members of the Litchfield Budget Committee reviewed the RSU4 proposed budget for the school year 2018-19. We appreciate the work of the School Board and administration in trying to balance the needs of the students, staff and taxpayers. Based on the review and discussion, the Committee voted to make the following recommendations:

1. In response to recent increases in school violence, the RSU Board is considering whether to hire a Student Resource Officer to better protect our students. We feel that given the very low probability of an incident in the SRU and the need to cover all five buildings, hiring one SRO is not an effective solution. Working with local law enforcement to reduce response times and improve communication may be a better approach. We recommend that you not hire a Student Resource Officer.
2. The State EPS local funding formula has caused great concern among taxpayers in Litchfield for many years. Unfortunately, the increase in State aid this year and the proposed expense budget will highlight the disparity between the State EPS and Local Additional Funds formulas. The present numbers will result in Litchfield taxpayers seeing an increase while Sabattus and Wales taxpayers see a decrease – a result that will likely be deemed by many as unfair to Litchfield. This will rub salt in this festering sore and will likely result in a political backlash that we would like to avoid. We recognize this is a political issue and not a financial issue, but do not see any good short-term alternatives. Given that it not possible to change either funding formula for the upcoming year, we recommend that the RSU4 Board reduce the budget to a level such that all three towns will receive a reduction in their assessments.

3. A significant number of voters and taxpayers of Litchfield have developed the feeling that the funding and representation structures in RSU#4 are unfair to Litchfield and that no one is listening to their concerns. Evidence of this appears in the poor turnout at RSU annual meetings and recent moves to vote down proposed budgets. Voters hear that “Nothing can be done” and become increasingly frustrated, antagonistic or apathic. We are in danger of losing the sense of unity that is necessary to make the RSU work. The majority of Litchfield’s Selectmen and Budget Committee members feel strongly that you and we collectively need to address this situation before it gets worse. The Budget Committee therefore recommends that the RSU Board lead a process that includes officials and voters of all three towns to review the structure of local cost sharing and representation among the towns and to make recommendations to the RSU voters at the May 2019 annual meeting. We hope this will provide a forum for discussion and an opportunity for voters to participate meaningfully and to vote on long-term solutions.

The funding problem is serious and very difficult to address. It will require goodwill and hard work on all our parts to educate people and consider possible remedies. We are aware that most of the problem results from the EPS formula’s reliance 100% on valuation, and that this cannot be changed at the local level. The present local formula seems fair with its 50%-50% split between valuation and student population, but the sum of the two is not. We are hopeful that there is a way to bring the towns together to find alternatives. One possibility is to shift the local formula even more to student population to offset the EPS bias.

Regardless of the outcome on funding issues, the important goal is to build greater participation and cohesion among the participating towns in the union. We are ready and willing to help in this effort.

Sincerely yours,

DB

David Blocher, Secretary

Litchfield Budget Committee