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Officials urge: Vote no on #2 Board asked to chime in on letter

Greg Vine

Friday, October 28, 2016

WINCHENDON — School Superintendent Steve Haddad Thursday night presented the Winchendon School Committee with a letter from the Massachusetts Teachers Association, asking that committee Chairman Danielle LaPointe provide the association with a quote stating her opposition to Question 2, the state ballot question that would lift the cap on charter schools. The quote is to be used in a targeted mailing designed to sway the minds of voters prior to the Nov. 8 general election.

LaPointe was more than willing to give her consent, but other members of the committee didn't want to be left out. The other three members of the panel – Janet Corbosiero, Dawn Harris and Larry Murphy – also expressed their desire to have their names added to the mailing.

"There's a limited pool of resources," said Haddad. "The idea that more charter schools won't hurt existing public schools just doesn't fly. Already, charter schools cost our district close to a half-million dollars each year. That's money we could definitely put to good use."

School Committee member Larry Murphy was quick to agree.

"Every year, public schools are losing staff and programs," he said. "We're fighting for every nickel and dime. To create more charter schools, to keep dividing up the limited funds the state has, makes no sense."

"You heard it here tonight," said Murphy, referring to a statement from one of the district's students of the month, who told the committee she was "getting a good education."

"We're doing a good job," said Murphy, "and we could do even better if we had the resources."

Haddad pointed out that Winchendon had lost out on a couple of state grants – an elementary school expansion grant and a grant that would have been targeted to special education – because there was less education funding in the state budget than had been anticipated.

"Even existing charters schools would be hurt because they'd be sharing what funding is available with the new charters," he said.

Haddad said he would advise the Massachusetts Teachers Association of the School Committee's decision as soon as possible.

In other action Thursday night, Business Manager Rich Ikonen filled in the committee on an article the district has placed on the warrant for the Nov. 14 special town meeting. The article is seeking just over \$55,000 to pay a total of 16 bills from past years that remain unpaid, one dating as far back as 2008.

Ikonen, who took over the job in July, discovered the bills while going through the department's books, noting that a couple were actually found tucked in drawers.

"We're just trying to get a clean slate so this never happens again," Ikonen told the Board of Selectmen earlier in the week.

"We'd like the town to vote to clear our conscience ... and our debt," added Haddad.

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