

TRANSCRIPT OF ACTON VOTERS GROUP VIDEO

OVERVIEW

Clint Seward, Chairman of Acton Voters Group, tells the School Committee at their Sept. 18, 2008 meeting that the AVG proposes to increase budgets by around 4% per year (rather than the 6.6% that they went up in FY 2008) and this can be done without cutting staff. AVG was asked to show a multi-year plan similar to the Acton Leadership Group plan and the AVG plan balanced the budget over the three years with no use of reserves. This was done to prepare for the October 2, 2008 Special Town Meeting.

Superintendent Bill Ryan stated that you could not have “baseline” budgets (maintain all services with no new staff hired and no one fired) that did not go up at least 5.75% - 6% annually. He predicted that the AVG proposed budget would result in 25 teaching positions eliminated in one year, and more layoffs if you fired non-certified staff.

The School Committee then voted unanimously to oppose the AVG proposal. Members spoke against the proposal at the Special Town Meeting and stated that large layoffs of staff and cutbacks to services would have to happen if the AVG proposal were enacted.

At the November 20, 2008 meeting of the School Committee, which occurred approximately seven weeks after the Special Town Meeting, Bill Ryan states that he will be proposing FY 2010 budgets with 4% increases that will have no layoffs and no cuts in service.

TRANSCRIPT

SEPTEMBER 18, 2008 SCHOOL COMMITTEE MEETING

CLINT SEWARD: The first is that...cutting positions. We're not going to cut positions. But what we are going to do is very clear. We're going to cut back on the rate of growth of the budgets. You have to do that. That's reality. That's the “Wall Street Journal” reality, and if we work together at it, we can do it without slashing budgets. But we won't get the same increase in staffing that we've had.

Last year we increased the budgets 6.6% and town and schools ended up having approximately 30 people. And I agree that with the reality the way it is in the world, the best way to protect the staff is – watch how much we grow the budgets. And what we said is you can avoid the override coming down the road by just cutting back some on the increase in the budgets.

We're not cutting staff. We're cutting back on the increase in the budgets.

HEATHER HARER: OK.

CLINT SEWARD: Bill?

BILL RYAN: I'd just like to make one comment. I've been doing this a long time. This is not rocket science. If school budgets--Salaries go up 4 ½ %. And salaries are going to go up whatever they are going to go up. We have that to talk about in a minute.

SHARON MCMANUS: They are defined by the contract.

BILL RYAN: They are defined by the contract. If everything else goes up 2 ½ %, and we can quibble about things like SPED, perhaps at 10%; utilities, 7 ½ - 10%; transportation; SPED transportation—you're going to have operating budgets that will be up somewhere between 5.75 and 6%. That's a base budget.

SHARON MCMANUS: That's no increase. No increase.

BILL RYAN: That's no increase. Nothing new. Can you go in and cut in the non-personnel areas? Sure, you can go in and cut, but we all know when you look at those pie charts, it's a small sliver of the pie.

So, the problem with Proposition 2 ½ and having good schools is Proposition 2 ½ will work, but it only works if every "x" number of years you have an operating override, or if you have reserves. That's why every "x" number of years we've had to have an operating override. Because, in point of fact, we can't run and have good schools with a 2 ½ % increase, or a 3% increase, or a 4% increase. You can have mediocre schools, but you're not gonna have good schools. And the fact of the matter is, when you get into making reductions, you can think of this building, if you're a Conant parent, you know what the staff are. You know, we can argue, is there any extra staff, and maybe we can argue about that, but there is "x" number of classrooms, and teachers in classrooms, there's a principal, there's office staff, there's a counselor, there a nurse, there's special education which is not gonna get touched, and if you have to make cuts, you're very quickly—and if you have to make cuts of any magnitude, you're very quickly in personnel and you're increasing class size.

If you have to cut a million dollars, you have to cut people. We can't get there any other way. We're not going to not heat the buildings. We're not gonna not maintain the buildings. Or you're gonna have to look at doing something none of us want to do that we've done for the last 15 years—more fees. Charge parents \$400 for transportation. We're charging now 190 bucks to play a sport.

So, the fact of the matter is, you know, you're not gonna have good schools increasing at 3 ½%. That's just a given.

HEATHER HARER: Thank you.

SHARON MCMANUS: It sounds like...if we were only going to increase 3.7%, that's actually a cut. Based on the assumptions that we know in terms of increases with the contracts, with healthcare, with the SPED which we have no control over.

BILL RYAN: And it's gonna be people that you're gonna cut, because it's a big number.

SHARON MCMANUS: Correct.

BILL RYAN: And in that first year, looking at their plan, um, I think the school, you know, the school cut would be somewhere around \$1.5 million dollars, and the problem is, as you all know, when you look at Acton's share—if Acton's share is half a million dollars, well, you've got to add Boxborough. You've got to cut more to get to Acton's share number.

And a million and a half is 25 FTEs. That's 25 FTEs at \$63,000.

HEATHER HARER: Right.

BILL RYAN: And if you want to cut support staff, then you have to cut more FTEs.

NOVEMBER 20, 2008 SCHOOL COMMITTEE MEETING

BILL RYAN: I'm using these numbers at the APS meeting, but for Boxborough members, if you look at the ALG plan, that assumes—school and municipal budgets, right now, in the plan, will go up 6.1%. And that's what was in the plan. And it assumes that we use about \$1.8 million dollars in reserves between Free Cash and NESWC, and about \$450,000 out of E & D, Acton's share. And if you look at the plan in the budgets at 6.1%, we have about a \$2.1 million dollar problem—deficit.

So my hope is we are going to have budgets, level service budgets, that are closer to 4 ½%. I hope we can get them down to—I'm pushing to try to get them down to 4%. But if they were 4 ½%, if the budgets were 4 1/2 %, then we have a problem of about \$780,000. OK? And assuming the town was able to do the same thing on the municipal side.

So we either have to use you know, more reserves, there are a lot of reserves, to find ¾ of a million dollars, or we have to make reductions. And that's level funding Chapter 70. You know, if Chapter 70 is reduced by 10%, then a \$780,000 problem becomes a \$1.9 million problem.

My guess is we're going to be somewhere in between level funding and 10%, I don't know what'll happen.

So...[unintelligible]...the budgets that we're going to see in December, we're going to try to get them as tight as we can and I'm pushing to get them down in the 4s. Right now, the budget, the base budget, is about 4.2%. There might be some preliminary numbers in there in terms of CASE, the CASE assessment, and CASE transportation. Those numbers

are too high. When the board meets, we're gonna cut those numbers. I wonder if the Executive Director knows that, but that's what's gonna happen. And so the numbers you are going to see are the numbers they have given us, but my hope is those numbers will be reduced.

ALLEN NITSCHELM, AVG BOARD MEMBER: If you're able to do budgets at 4 or 4 ½%, what type of layoffs would that incur?

BILL RYAN: It would incur no layoffs. That would mean a level service budget. The same program that we presently have.

ALLEN NITSCHELM: So you're saying that if the school budgets go up 4% or 4 ½%, in that range, you can do that without any layoffs?

BILL RYAN: I'm hoping that's the case, yes.

ALLEN NITSCHELM: OK, so coming up to the Special Town Meeting, you said at a meeting that budgets had to go up 5.75 – 6% and there is no way you could have budgets go up 4 or 4 ½% without significant layoffs. That's what you said in advance of the Special Town Meeting, you said it at a School Committee meeting, and now you seem to be contradicting that.

BILL RYAN: I did say budgets would go up about 5 ½ % in terms of level service budgets. As you know, it's more complicated than that. It depends on, it depends on a lot of factors, it depends on what's happening with utilities, what's happening with SPED, what's happening with salaries, et cetera.

ALLEN NITSCHELM: OK, but I'm just....OK, so, you're so... now 4, 4 ½%, you can do it without layoffs. OK.

BILL RYAN: I'm hoping that's the case, yes.

ALLEN NITSCHELM: OK, thank you.

HEATHER HARER: But not always.

BILL RYAN: Yeah, but not always. That assumes...for example...for example, if you're going to look at the utilities, we have 10% was the initial guideline from the Finance Committee for utilities. I think our budgets will show about a 4% increase in utilities. And here we have a 10% increase for SPED, and we'll see what that ends up. That's not where they are right now, but I think again, if the CASE numbers reduce significantly, it won't be 10%.

So it really depends on those big few items. Special education. Utilities. You reign those in. They vary each year.

ALLEN NITSCHELM: So when the Acton Voters Group said a 4 to 4 ½% increase in the budget would not lead to layoffs, and you guys said it absolutely would lead to layoffs, that's not true then.

BILL RYAN: I think over time, it does lead to layoffs.