

Budget

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the next year's spending plan.

Keiser and Financial Director Tina Collins said that they "did some quick research," and asked questions of their financial advisor First Southwest of Lincoln that afternoon. They were told that it was "atypical for schools to carry a large fund balance," Keiser said.

The school district's current fund balance is some \$446,000, according to the audit completed for July 1, 2005.

Council Vice President Julio DiGiando was the first of the councilors to ask the school board what they planned to do with that money.

School Committee Chairwoman Cathy Kaiser said they would not use the surplus to fund operating expenses. They would use it instead to pay for capital expenses, some \$68,637 of which would be used to fund a portion of the \$119,880 in capital projects to be expended in fiscal year 2007, she said.

"There's a certain level we need to keep," to fund unexpected costs such as "one medically-fragile child who might come into the system," she noted.

In all the years he has been on the council, an exact figure for a proper school reserve balance had never come up, Long pointed out. "It's always been referred to as 'x' amount," he said.

School board member William "Bucky" Brennan said it was a perfectly valid question and that an amount had never been settled on in past discussions.

"This is a very serious conversation," Kaiser, the committee chairwoman, said about the fund balance. "We need to look at it

statewide," she added. She brought up the topic of pending litigations and said that those kinds of payments are not in the budget. "Where do payments come from if they're not in the budget?" Kaiser asked.

"We're open to having the discussion, Kaiser said, but she added, "Everyone needs to know what could happen" if there was no emergency funding source.

Bruce Keiser said for towns, a balance of between 20 and 25 percent was suggested, and that Jamestown currently carried a surplus of some \$4.3 million in its coffers, which is about 17 percent of the total budget.

"You could always ask the town" for money if, for example, the roof blew off one of the schools, Keiser said, noting that the town technically owns the school buildings.

The budget presented to the council was smaller than that passed by the School Committee last month. A savings of some \$41,742 was realized after they received next year's rates for Blue Cross health insurance, Sipala said.

The greatest increases to the budget are similar to those in recent years. Sipala listed them as contributions to the pension system, health-care costs, rising fuel charges, charter-school tuitions, and increased incidences in the number of children with autism.

Two contracts that expire on June 30 are currently being negotiated between the school district and the Jamestown Teachers' Association and the Jamestown Educational Support Personnel Association. Exact figures for salaries could not be put in the spending plan, so estimates of the expected increases may change depending on the collective bargaining outcomes.



Where in the World is the Jamestown Press?
Don Miller reads the Press in Auckland during his recent trip to New Zealand.

Lawn school

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7 and 8 students be educated off-island.

School Committee Chairwoman Cathy Kaiser brought up the idea of surveying members of the community to see how certain groups felt about sending students off-island for junior high.

Without really knowing what the town sentiment is regarding sending not only high schoolers but also junior high students to another town to be educated, the committee cannot determine which direction to take on the issue.

"C'mon. Give us a hint," Kaiser said about community input, "Where should we be aiming here?" Kaiser asked rhetorically.

A discussion on who should be included in a survey ensued between members of the school board, with some of them asking to poll only members of the school community and others advocating for input from the community at large.

School board member William "Bucky" Brennan said that taxpayers should be included in the survey because many of the rea-

sons for sending students off-island have to do with cost-saving measures that will impact everyone.

"The whole community is the community," Brennan said, casting his vote to survey everyone.

Julia Held, another member of the School Committee said that it was most important to get information from the "educational community."

Kaiser said, "You want people with an immediate experience in the schools to answer" the survey questions.

It was decided that the superintendent would call some professional surveying companies to begin the process to design a survey to solicit response from the school community.

"We can't wait any longer," Sipala said, noting that she would begin the survey immediately.

Whether or not students are educated off-island directly impacts whether the school district should look to add a full or part-time administrator at the Lawn school. School Committee Vice Chairman Julie Kallfelz said, "We can't let time pass without addressing the leadership at Lawn."

Members Held and Kallfelz volunteered to head up an advisory committee on the survey initiative.

An informal survey asking "Should Jamestown's junior high students be educated off-island?" is now on the Press' Web site at www.jamestownpress.com.

Drivers needed for Soap Box Derby on May 13

The 11th Annual All American Newport Lions Soap Box Derby will take place on Saturday, May 13, on Memorial Boulevard in Newport. The rain date is Sunday, May 14. Racing begins at 9 a.m.

"Sponsors" of a soap box

derby car will give a youngster the chance to experience the thrill of racing in the All American Soap Box Derby and the potential opportunity to represent Rhode Island in the National Soap Box Derby held in Akron, Ohio, on Saturday, July 22, where the winning driver will be sent to compete at the expense of the Newport Lions Club.

The deadline for applications is April 10. Call the Derby hot line at 848-5884 for further information.

The soap box derby is sponsored by the Newport Lions Club with the generous help of the Viking Riders.

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