

School committee accepts proposed budget cuts

By Kevin Ford
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KINGSTON – The Silver Lake regional school committee voted to accept more than \$500,000 in line item cuts to the 2006 budget last week, but only after a spirited debate about the committee's authority to do so.

The committee voted a budget of approximately \$18 million at its March 25 meeting, requiring the half million in cuts. They did not, however, specify particular items to be cut.

Silver Lake's director of business, John Tuffy, distributed a gray copy of the 2006 budget Thursday, along with a separate yellow sheet detailing each line item cut, to committee members.

Legislative agent John Creed moved to accept the cuts, but vice chairman Tom Cambria questioned the wisdom of such a move.

"I think it sets a dangerous precedent for the committee to begin to vote line items and especially to set them in cement," he said. "The administration needs the flexibility to use the money that we vote in ways that might not necessarily be evident today."

Secretary Maureen Springer agreed.

"John, I think it's so appropriate that you picked gray for this budget," she said, "because as far as I'm

concerned it's about as gray as you can get."

Committee member Ellen Snoeyenbos, however, supported Creed's move to certify the line items. Snoeyenbos, of Halifax, told the committee she needed to tell her constituents specifically where the administration would spend the money.

"If I'm going to have any credibility in Halifax over what I'm asking my town to vote for, I need to know exactly what the lines in the budget are and defend them," she said.

Creed said the committee needed to have total control over the budget and the administration would need to consult the committee on specific expenditures anyway.

Chairman Geralde Buckley disagreed, saying the committee never voted specific line items in the past.

"I've been on this committee for nine years," she said. "I don't recall ever voting to move, or anyone in the administration asking us to move, a line item."

Creed said the law granted the committee line item autonomy, but Buckley insisted the Education Reform Act of 1993 changed that.

According to Department of Education spokesman Heidi Perlman, the school committee, in consultation with the superintendent, has the final word on all aspects of the

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budget. She said the education reform act didn't affect that status.

Assistant superintendent Elizabeth Sorrell asked the committee to give the administration some flexibility on spending. She said state auditors may require additional funding for some programs not provided for in the current budget.

"Our job is to make sure we have an educationally sound budget," she said. "Your job is to make sure we have a fiscally sound budget. We have to work together on that."

Sorrell assured those present the administration would discuss any new spending with the committee.

After the committee voted to accept the cuts, treasurer Patricia Doherty thanked Tuffy for his efforts to revise and explain the budget. The committee then offered the director of business, who doubles as a Duxbury selectman, a round of applause.