

## One chance to change RSU18 budget

by Mary Grow

China voters who don't like the 2010-2011 school budget have one chance to do something about it.

The Regional School Unit 18 open budget meeting will be held at 6:30 p.m. Thursday, May 13, at the Messalonskee Performing Arts Center in Oakland. Voters from Belgrade, China, Oakland, Rome and Sidney will come together to discuss the budget and to amend it if a majority so votes.

Only 17 people were in the audience at the April 27 China hearing on the \$33,381,196 budget. All except three were town or school officials or staff.

RSU 18 Superintendent Gary Smith said the budget process was difficult this year and will be worse next year. State funding has been cut for 2010-11 and will be cut again the following year, and federal stimulus money that helped replace state money for next year is unlikely to be available in 2011-2012.

Despite the difficulties, the budget approved by the RSU board is \$428,103 lower than the current year's budget. Achieving the savings required freezing most salaries for next year (Smith said one bargaining unit whose pre-RSU contract is still in force will get the contracted increase, about 3 percent), making administrative rearrangements in Oakland, not replacing all retiring personnel and postponing maintenance and non-essential spending requests.

The budget allows for three measures to bring China policies into line with policies in the other four towns.

- An educational technician will be assigned to the library in each of China's two elementary schools, and technology and kindergarten aides will be added to the staff.

- China secretaries will change from a 222-day work year to a year-round schedule on the same pay scale as secretaries in the other towns.

- All China students will ride the same buses, instead of continuing separate runs for elementary-school and high-school stu-

dents.

The combined bus runs in China have reportedly upset some parents. Smith said the change will save about \$75,000 a year. China Principal Carl Gartley said that to help allay parents' concerns, some of next year's savings will be used to install cameras on the buses.

In addition, Gartley said, it will be easier for Erskine students to ride buses: there will be door-to-door pickup for them as well as for elementary students. Smith said there will be no more rides starting at 6:15 a.m.; with revised school schedules to accommodate the change, the earliest pickups will be around 6:45.

According to figures Smith prepared for the April 27 hearing, the total local contribution required to match state funds will increase by \$1.2 million, because all five towns' state valuations have increased more than the state or even the Kennebec County average.

However, due to tight budgeting, the overall local assessment, including what used to be called additional local funds without state participation, will be almost \$4,000 lower than in the current year.

Because of the state and RSU funding formulas and changes in member towns' valuations, the effect of the proposed budget is different for each town.

Smith's figures show China's assessment dropping more than \$9,000, from \$3,599,451 to \$3,589,783. Rome sees a much larger decrease, from \$1.8 million to \$1.64 million. Belgrade's taxpayers will pay almost \$7,000 more, Sidney's over \$75,000 more and Oakland's over \$95,000 more.

After the May 13 open meeting, a budget validation referendum will be held in each town Thursday, May 20, with polls open from noon to 8 p.m. Voters will either approve or reject the total figure that came out of the May 13 meeting.

Other questions on the May 20 ballot will ask if voters want to continue the budget referendum and if they will authorize RSU 18 to establish a fuel stabilization

## Public works discussions dominate meeting

by Beth Choate

Public Works dominated the April 26th Windsor selectman's meeting. The town recently purchased a 2010 Ford 550. The truck is white and comes with heated mirrors and a "fishstick" remote control plow control along with other options.

Interim road supervisor Keith Hall said they have done some grading and ditch work on the Wingood Road and they replaced a crushed culvert on the Barton Road. Selectman Ed Hubbard asked Hall what they do with the extra ditch material. Hall explained they added it to the shoulder on one road and made an entry into a field on another. Hubbard said it didn't look professional, "it's not becoming of a road." He asked Hall to go back and fix a couple areas.

The discussion went back to the new truck. Hubbard said he would like to make sure that the town has a written record that documents the truck is being taken care of. Town manager Theresa Haskell pointed out that all of the town trucks have a maintenance book in each truck. There is \$11,984 left in the public works truck reserve account, which should be enough to cover the cost of the new sander that will be purchased to go in the new truck.

Hall said he is working on where the paving will take place this summer. He suggested that the town grind and pave the Windsor Neck Road. Town manager Theresa Haskell explained that where the town had just used grant money to fix the shoulders on that road, the road would be all ready to grind and pave. Hall added that he has spent a lot of money on patch to fill in the potholes at the bottom of the hill.

Hubbard said that they have to look at population densities and ask how many people are you

fund, a reserve fund for future fuel price spikes. If approved, Smith said the plan is to put \$65,000 saved during the past mild winter into the fund.

Also at the April 27 hearing were plans for an expanded China Primary School to serve all elementary students and a survey asking for residents' comments on future educational trends.

serving by doing that stretch of road. Windsor resident Tom Reed spoke up saying that you have to look at thru traffic as well, not just the number of people living on the road.

Hall pointed out that the town can't keep everybody happy as they are so far behind and have little money to work with. Hall said he would at least like to get price estimates for the projects. Hubbard said, "Right now we don't have any money and it is presumptuous to assume how much we will get." Hubbard suggested repaving the Weeks Mills Road which had been done in the recent past, saying the road needs to be saved. He added about roads in poor condition, "it doesn't cost you any more if you wait on those roads."

Hall asked if the selectmen could get together sometime and decide because he didn't want to keep running around. Hall said the town had spent money on the Weeks Mills Road and he would like to see the road work spread out more evenly around town.

He also asked if the selectmen wanted to keep doing the practice of fixing several small areas. He said the paving companies told him it costs the town \$500-\$600 every time they move to a new area to pave. Hubbard said that they're taking some ridiculous areas and making them better.

The selectmen decided to review the report written a few years back by a road committee, to get a map of the areas being considered for road work/paving and to decide when to get togeth-

er at their next meeting.

Town manager Theresa Haskell said that she has a meeting May 10 to discuss money issues with the school. Last July the town was told they had an estimated \$40,000 surplus for the school budget. The school audit has been finalized and there is a \$117,000 deficit. The town's auditor says the town audit and the school audit do not add up. Haskell scheduled the meeting with the two auditors, the superintendent, and herself to find out where the deficit is and why. She wants to know why they authorized such overspending. "I'm not looking for someone to blame, I just want to know why," Haskell says.

Also the town has been told they owe the town of Palermo \$40,000 in local entitlement money for the school that they never received. Haskell says she wants to know the details; she is not just going to up and pay this bill without the information behind it.

The selectmen reviewed information from the town's tax assessor including the news that there was a 1.35 percent decrease in state valuation of the town. However, there was bad news for some tax payers, the state decreased the value of the homestead exemption, which will increase taxes for people who already declare homestead exemption as they will be receiving less of an exemption.

The next selectmen's meeting is scheduled for May 11.

## Sustain Mid-Maine to hold presentation on "Daylighting"

The Education Team of Sustain Mid-Maine Coalition will host a presentation on Daylighting, a way to save money by using natural light on Thursday, May 13, at 5:30 p.m., at Barrel's Community Market on Main Street in Waterville. This event is free and open to all.

The Sustain Mid-Maine Coalition welcomes people from all over central Maine to join its work, give their ideas and attend events. Various committees make up this grassroots coalition dedicated to energy conservation and creative thinking. Everyone is welcome to attend any and all of these meetings.

The Energy Team will meet Tuesday, May 11, at 5 p.m., in the Waterville Mayor's Conference Room. Rethink, Reduce, Recycle Team will meet Wednesday, May 12, at noon, in the Mayor's Conference Room. Transportation Team will meet on Thursday, May 13, at 4 p.m., at KVCOG.

For more information contact Interim Coordinator Linda Woods at 680-4208.

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