

December 3, 2020
School Committee Budget Hearing

A remote budget hearing of the Wareham School Committee, Finance Committee, Board of Selectmen and Town Administration was held on Thursday, December 3, 2020 at 7:00 p.m. using zoom technology.

Call to Order/Roll Call:

Present from School Committee: Joyce Bacchiocchi, Michael Flaherty, Kevin Brogioli, Apryl Rossi, and Mary Morgan. Also present, Dr. Kimberly Shaver-Hood, Superintendent, Dr. Andrea Schwamb, Assistant Superintendent, Christine Suckow, Interim Business Manager, and Jamie Wiksten, Recording Secretary. The meeting was recorded and broadcast live by WCTV.

Board of Selectmen Roll Call: Peter Teitelbaum, Patrick Tropeano, Judith Whiteside, Alan Slavin, James Munise, and Derek Sullivan, Town Administrator.

Finance Committee Roll Call: Bernard Pigeon, David Heard, Joseph Smith, Gerald Stefanski and Thomas Worthen.

Chair Bacchiocchi welcomed everyone to the meeting, and turned the meeting over to Dr. Kimberly Shaver-Hood and Christine Suckow, Interim Business Manager.

Dr. Shaver-Hood presented the budget and reminded the committees that the Wareham Public Schools always connects everything, including the budget, to the school vision. The presented budget continues to ensure the safety, security and emotional well-being for all students, meets all legal and contractual obligations, mandates that the school provide the best possible educational environment, and not only maintains, but moves Wareham students forward.

Ms. Suckow explained that the new proposed budget \$32,553,073 is with reductions. The first budget presented was just over 9.5% percent increase in the total budget. The budget that is now proposed is just over 6%. Requested staff was removed from the budget and reductions have been made to the out of district, private, and collaborative tuitions. The total reduction is \$1,930,386.00, which brings down the increase to the proposed budget of 6.3%.

Proposed Budget for FY22:

Net and Non-Net

NET: \$30,502,623

NON-NET: \$2,050,450

SUB-TOTAL: \$32,553,073

REVENUE SOUCES: \$1,000,000

TOTAL: \$31,553,073

Chair Bacchiocchi opened the meeting to the School Committee, Finance Committee, and Board of Selectmen for questions.

Mr. Pigeon asked the difference between the level funding that was passed last year, to what the school is requesting now.

Ms. Suckow responded \$2,100,022.

Mr. Pigeon questioned the allowance allocated for the new school building.

Dr. Shaver-Hood responded that the moving costs are in the administration lines.

Mr. Pigeon found it disappointing that the new building was not broken out separately in the budget. He asked at what point the school committee actually assumes care and custody of the new school building.

Dr. Shaver-Hood responded when the building is turned over to the school district is when WPS assumes responsibility. Dr. Shaver-Hood continued that the business office has looked at the combined utility cost, and the various other heating costs in the two existing elementary schools and left the two buildings separate in the budget, because at this point the school district is operating as separate buildings and not one facility.

Mr. Pigeon responded that accounting wise, the new building should be a separate entity in the operational budget and would rather see that as a separate line item in the budget.

Ms. Suckow responded that she would work on this request.

The Chair asked for further questions and comments.

Mr. Flaherty commented that the strategic plan calls for lower class sizes, and that he can't vote for 25 – 26 students per classroom, especially in the new school.

Ms. Seamans confirmed that if she was to receive an additional fourth grade teacher, her class size would be at 22/23 students, but without the additional teacher, the class size would be at 25/26 students.

Mr. Slavin commented on the 9% that the school originally asked for, now presented as 6.3% and expressed his concerns that the school is budgeting for something that unfortunately is not going to be available.

Mr. Pigeon responded that the legislator has finally passed the budget for FY21. The level funding which we are currently experiencing (and enjoying) is probably out of the question. Wareham will see a significant shortfall as projected by mass tax, the MMA, the Superintendent's Association, and the School Committee Association.

The monies Wareham spends for the school department to function is about 62% of the entire town budget. When there's an increase in the school department for a request, it takes a significant amount of money to satisfy the school department needs. Mr. Pigeon continued that the budget is relatively optimistic, and could have a significant effect on the move into the new building.

The Chair responded that the budget was developed without asking for any extras. The Chair reminded the committees that there are no additional personnel included in this budget, and the enrollment is projected to go up next year. The school department always adapts to the yearly budget in order to provide the services for our students.

Ms. Fay spoke about her concerns of the homeless population and the amount of children who have entered DCF, the Department of Children families network, through referrals for neglect and abuse, has increased by 30% since COVID.

She explained that Wareham is responsible for transportation for Wareham students who were in our district and have been relocated to other areas, and Wareham is responsible to split that transportation cost

with a district where the child is relocated. In addition, Wareham has had an increase of about 30% of removals from homes in Wareham to other foster homes, or group living situations in other districts/towns, because of removal from DCF.

Ms. Fay expressed her concerns, as she had built in some safeguards into the budget that now have been removed.

The Chair opened the meeting to the public.

Lisa Ann Fernald, a Wareham Public Schools employee in the transportation department for over 8 years addressed the committees and stated that the drivers are looking for clarity as they are not understanding financially, why all the bus runs that are out of town have now been put out to bid, and feels it is due to alleged shortage of drivers. Ms. Fernald stated that there have been resignations in the transportation department, and the vacancies are not filled. She continued explaining that the dispatcher and transportation manager are both driving bus routes, due to lack of drivers. She acknowledged that it has been very challenging to recruit drivers and there is a nationwide shortage. Ms. Fernald tried recruiting other CDL drivers, along with parents and acquaintances who are willing to train for the CDL, but most of the candidates are not receiving callbacks, as there is no one in the office to answer the calls.

The Chair explained to Ms. Fernald that the meeting is a budget hearing, only specific to the fiscal year 2022 budget.

Ms. Fernald felt her comments do effect the FY22 budget, if the bus runs are put out to bid.

Ms. Fay addressed the comment. Ms. Fay explained that she spoke to many members of DESE and McKinney Vento. She explained the bus driver shortage is a Commonwealth wide issue and would be willing to work with the transportation director outside the scope of this particular meeting.

Mr. Flaherty compared the spreadsheet with the spreadsheet shared at the budget workshop on November 3. Programs with other school districts was originally 19% of the budget, now is 11% of the budget, and asked what caused the change.

Ms. Suckow explained the programs with other school districts is used for the tuition of collaborative and private schools that were built into the budget as a placeholder and was partly removed. If a child moves into Wareham, WPS is responsible for that child whether he/she goes to Wareham Public Schools, a collaborative, or a private school.

Mr. Flaherty responded that on November 3, the placeholder was \$469,000 and today it's \$268,000. He asked how we make up those savings.

Ms. Fay explained that making cuts is a very difficult thing to do. To avoid cuts from programming for our existing students, she looks first at placeholders. When you look at either cutting in our current program which supports our current students, it is easier to cut from places where there is buffering, which is the reason why we made the decision to cut placeholders.

Dr. Shaver-Hood responded that as educators, this is the budget that we need to support our students. But the school has always lived within its means, and the school district will continue to work collaboratively with the town and do what we have to do.

Mr. Worthen responded that the school cannot go in front of the town and give a budget that is going to be overspent, and that the town has to understand what the limitations are in terms of the service the school provides at the lower budgeted number.

Mr. Pigeon responded that the school and town have always worked well together. Unfortunately, these circumstances are beyond anybody's control, and he would be very pessimistic to suggest that Plan B be level funding. The money just isn't there in the town revenues.

The Chair stated that she appreciates the information provided by the finance committee, but the budget doesn't include anything that isn't needed. Everyone in the school department is being asked to do more and more with less and less, and what the school department is asking for, is what is needed.

Derek Sullivan's goal is to get 2% for the School Department and wishes it were much higher.

The Chair expressed that the process is frustrating, as one day the committee hears from all the principals and directors about everything that is necessary to move forward to the next year. It's exciting to hear Administration talk about what's going on in the schools and what they're hoping to accomplish. And then within a few weeks, the committee is right back at the budget hearing. She stated to all of the principals, directors and superintendent, that they were heard, and the committee will continue to work as hard as they can to make sure the schools have what they need.

Mr. Pigeon assured the School Department that the finance committee readily understands how hard everyone is working, and is so pleased with the success that the School Department has had with such modest resources.

With no further discussion, Mr. Flaherty made a motion to adjourn the school committee meeting, seconded by Apryl Rossi.

Roll Call vote:

Apryl Rossi – yea, Mary Morgan – yea, Kevin Brogioli – yea, Michael Flaherty – yea, and Chair Bacchiocchi – yea

Yea- 5

Nay – 0

Abstain – 0

VOTE: 5-0-0

Judith Whiteside made a motion to adjourn the Board of Selectmen meeting, seconded by Patrick Tropeano.

Roll Call Vote: Peter Teitelbaum -yea, Patrick Tropeano - yea, Judith Whiteside -yea, Alan Slavin - yea, James Munise – yea

Yea -5

Nay – 0

Abstain – 0

VOTE: 5-0-0

David Heard made a motion to adjourn the Finance Committee, seconded by Gerald Stefanski.

Bernard Pigeon - yea, David Heard - yea, Joseph Smith - yea, Gerald Stefanski - yea, and Thomas Worthen - yea

Yea - 5

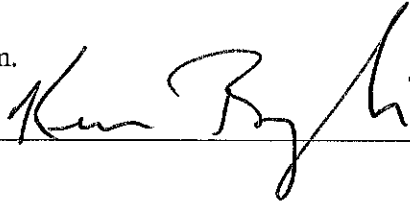
Nay - 0

Abstain - 0

5-0-0

The meeting adjourned at 8:19 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted by:

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Ken Rygiel", is written over a horizontal line.