

**MINUTES OF THE TOWN COUNCIL
EDUCATION COMMITTEE
Town Hall Council Chambers
March 18, 2013 - Monday**

Present: Thomas J. Lacey, Chairman
Francis Burke, Vice Chairman
Ed Harrington, Councilor
Michael Molisse, Councilor

Not Present: Jane Hackett, Councilor

Also Present: Dr. Salim, School Superintendent
Sean Guilfoyle, Weymouth School Committee
Linda Belmarsh, Weymouth School Committee

Recording Secretary: Mary Barker

Chairman Lacey called the meeting to order at 5:30 PM. He reported that the matter was referred by the Town Council and at the specific request of Councilor Harrington.

Determining Optimal Classroom Size

Councilor Harrington reported that he requested a referral in an attempt to determine the state of the town's financial affairs. Police and Fire have undergone manpower shortages, and the DPW will have difficulty maintaining town fields. The OPEB liability continues to grow. He is trying to get a sense of the total revenue deficiencies and what the town can do to increase revenues. He would also like to determine the impact on property values and to inform the public. He asked the school department where specific increases in funding are needed, and their standing as relates to other towns. Dr. Salim noted that Weymouth was 4th from the bottom in 2011 and 9th in 2012 in meeting net school spending (NSS). Despite revenue shortfalls, they seem to be doing well as far as MCAS scores. He provided a brief discussion on the calculation of the NSS formula. Last year was a turning point-- the town was able to meet NSS, but over the last several years the town was unable to which resulted in a carryover deficit that is \$1 million going into this year. Councilor Harrington asked if he has concerns about this year. Dr. Salim responded that he is compiling his findings from his first year in Weymouth with feedback from the Budget subcommittee to determine what the schools will need to achieve their goals.

Councilor Harrington reported that it would require \$71,082,000 to break even and eliminate carryovers of NSS. He questions where the town ranks in comparison to other towns. Dr. Salim responded that the town is moving in the direction to make headway. Ms. Belmarsh noted that a level service budget at this time will not allow them to meet the NSS requirement. Councilor Harrington questioned the effect the Governor's budget has on meeting NSS. Dr. Salim responded that Weymouth is not as bad off as other communities.

Councilor Lacey noted that he has had many discussions around net school spending; the formula itself is flawed because some communities are allowed to factor in their retired employees health care and some are not. There isn't a level playing field across the board and changes are necessary in the legislation to standardize the formula. He noted that the town has been consistently told the legislation cannot be changed. Ms. Belmarsh noted that the NSS is the bare minimum base, and they must consider what it takes to make the schools succeed. The process is backwards. Mr. Guilfoyle noted that there are also changes to the curriculum to consider, and these will require additional staffing needs. There are many unfunded mandates they face. Councilor Harrington noted that they patch together a budget each year. There is no fat anywhere else without sacrificing public safety and the budget is restricted each year by Proposition 2 ½. If the state does not come through, it will be a real concern. The town needs to get to the point where they don't have to worry. He noted Weymouth's standing makes it clear they are not playing at full advantage.

Councilor Harrington asked for a review of what is considered an appropriate class size and where Weymouth is currently in relation. Dr. Salim responded that the Weymouth Teachers' Association has determined a class size of 28 for grades 7-12, but that in actual practice the department makes an effort to lower the number particularly in the lower grades, to accommodate reading instruction and personal learning, as they move forward with new curriculum and assessment standards. Staffing size is dependent on budget and fluctuates to accommodate bubbles. Decisions to shift teachers are made by mid-summer. They attempt to keep an average of 25-28 students per class in core academic classes.

Councilor Harrington asked if they are satisfied with class sizes. Dr. Salim responded that there are a few areas of concern-certain grade levels in particular schools, but that they try to do the best with it. Ms. Belmarsh reviewed the requests for additional teaching staff and specialists. Dr. Salim also noted there are other broader needs around leadership, and specialists for students who struggle, which should be met. Needs are different than 20 years ago because of the number of mandates. He hears from teachers who need more time to collaborate with each other and district-wide to meet the curriculum.

Councilor Harrington asked about the athletics portion of education- how to share responsibility for care of shared fields. Dr. Salim noted that athletics was funded for the first time in a number of years. This is a community that has strong athletic values as well as academic, and this is clearly shared by the families. The DPW and school department have worked well together to maintain the fields. The high school field will need to be replaced in the not too distant future. There are capital needs related to athletics. Mr. Guilfoyle noted that compaction of the fields also needs to be addressed and more substantial maintenance is required- this is not just school fields but across the town. As they begin to tear up fields, it will require funding and eliminates their use. Other towns are reluctant to play on less than adequate surfaces.

Councilor Harrington asked that they review the following and determine a dollar figure is adequate to address these issues:

- Fields

- Classroom size
- Wish list beyond bare bones to flesh out programs and bring them up to more appropriate levels

Ms. Belmarsh noted that a list of needs came out of their public hearing. It's a good start from which to build. Councilor Harrington thanked the participants. He noted the administration and Council is doing what it can, but there are serious conditions in town that need to be brought to the public's attention.

ADJOURNMENT

At 6:18PM, there being no further business, a motion was made by Councilor Burke to adjourn the meeting and was seconded by Councilor Harrington. UNANIMOUSLY VOTED.

Respectfully submitted by Mary Barker as Recording Secretary

Approved by Chairman Thomas J. Lacey
Education Committee