

**TOWN COUNCIL MINUTES
EDUCATION COMMITTEE
Town Hall Council Chambers
February 28, 2012**

PRESENT: Thomas J. Lacey, Chairman
Michael Molisse, Councilor
Jane Hackett, Councilor
Ed Harrington, Councilor

ALSO PRESENT: Gail Sheehan Weymouth School Committee
Matthew Ferron, Interim Superintendent of Schools
Lisa Belmarsh, School Committee Budget Chair

RECORDING SECRETARY: Ann Flynn Dickinson

NOT PRESENT: Victor Pap

Chairman Lacey called the Education Committee meeting to order at 7:00 pm.

Chairman Lacey reviewed the difference between a public meeting and a public hearing. A Public Hearing has to be posted and/or advertised for the Public to be heard and a public meeting can be attended by the public, but they are not allowed to speak.

This is a Public Meeting with the School Committee and School Administration. Topics that were discussed were Net School Spending Status for Town, Update on Superintendent Search, Update on 2013 School Budget as well as the issue of Funding for High School Athletics.

Gail Sheehan, Lisa Belmarsh and Interim Superintendent Matthew Ferron were invited to the table to present on these matters with an open dialogue.

Interim Superintendent Matthew Ferron stated that net school spending has been a popular topic over the last several years.

There are a lot of different opinions as to the priorities that need to be made. He stated that the town needs to be sure they comparing apples to apples. There is a benchmark of numbers for adequately funding the Commonwealth. Weymouth is in the same category as Wellesley and Fall River as pertains to the formula for calculation being used.

Chairperson Lacey questioned how we were in the same category, and to please clarify.

Interim Superintendent Matthew Ferron replied that the category he was speaking of is that the formula is the same but property values and income levels are not- but we are all using the same formula.

SNAPSHOT OF NET SCHOOL SPENDING OVERVIEW FROM FISCAL 2009

Interim Superintendent Matthew Ferron stated that 2009 was the first year the town started to decline. There was a deficiency of \$27,000. This was a push. FY10 was an unfavorable budget year. The deficiency was believed to be \$3.8M. The town had to go back and correct the pension costs, and our carry over to FY11 was \$1.7M.

\$1.758 is the actual deficiency and not the 3.8. This is important because our deficiency percentage can not exceed 5 percent without penalties and we do not want to be in that category because they can withhold funding.

We left FY11 with a deficit of \$1.758 and looking at FY12 with an additional amount that is roughly \$200,000, the town's shortfall is just under \$2m. We will be rolling over \$1.97 well under the 5 percent budget threshold.

FY13 will show a deficit of \$400,000. Those numbers together come to \$2.4M deficit. We are making progress but are continuing to carry a multi-million dollar shortfall.

Chairperson Lacey stated the number going into 2013 is closer to the 5 percent and stated that this is encouraging. There are questions around the FY11-12 budget, both these years we saw a shortfall from carryover.

Interim Superintendent Matthew Ferron confirmed there was a \$200,000 shortfall in 2012.

Chairperson Lacey reiterated the carryover of \$1.9M from the 2012 to 2013 budget and in this plan there is an additional \$395 adding to the deficit carryover.

Interim Superintendent Matthew Ferron confirmed that was correct.

Chairperson Lacey asked if the School Committee's intent is to operate with a \$395,000 shortfall.

Ms. Belmarsh stated that the level service budget that was posted is what we are starting with. That was based on the contractual increases we need to account for.

Chairperson Lacey questioned why the school committee asked for the appropriate amount of money instead of adding to the deficit. If we are still in the process of figuring out what the bottom line number is then the 57199 does not account for total fiscal spending,

Ms. Belmarsh responded that Chairperson Lacey was correct; we haven't asked for it yet. We should be including the net school spending.

Councilor Jane Hackett stated she was looking at the total town spending for FY11 12. \$1M last year, \$12.5 this year, (total of \$13.4) and asked where the figures were derived.

Interim Superintendent Matthew Ferron responded that the Mayor's Office and Mr. McKinney supplied the numbers and they are derived from Insurance, Pension costs for non- teacher employees and health insurance rates. We will find out from GIC what health insurance rates will be next year. That number is what we have seen in the first few years.

Councilor Jane Hackett stated this is the largest increase by 100%. She additionally questioned whether the property insurance figures were included.

Interim Superintendent Matthew Ferron replied that all insurance that would cover the School Department is shared with the town.

Chairperson Lacey questioned if this was the proposed budget they were submitting and asked if the committee foresees adjustments.

Ms. Belmarsh replied, yes, these will be adjusted. These are town issues not just school issues.

Chairperson Lacey asked if the School Committee plan is to have another public hearing, due to the changes made to the town charter.

Ms. Belmarsh confirmed that all of their meetings are public. If the budget is revised they would consider another meeting. The budget has to be into the Mayor by April 3rd. The next meeting will be March 22nd.

Chairperson Lacey commented that his recommendation would be not to add to deficit. If the needs are there then ask for more funding to support the needs.

Councilor Molisse completely agrees with Chairperson Lacey's comments.

President Arthur Mathews commented on the calculations of net school spending and questioned if the state ever looked at declining home values and unemployment rates, noting declining property values.

Interim Superintendent Matthew Ferron stated right now the Governor does not point at declining income or property values for educational funding. The town's property values have been declining for the last 5 years. Property values are down about 20% as they were 5 years ago.

President Mathews commented that there were a few years that he remembers that if property values declined the formula would change.

Interim Superintendent Matthew Ferron stated he is not sure how this administration will handle this and he would find out.

Councilor Harrington commented on the formula --Weymouth has the lowest tax bills in a 20 mile radius. We can not boost it up because we are mandated to 2 ½ percent.

Interim Superintendent Matthew Ferron will obtain more information to clarify with Council and the community to be reasonably coherent.

Councilor Harrington asked if, during budget formulation, the school committee was negotiating contracts with different groups and will there be any increases.

Interim Superintendent Matthew Ferron stated there is no money for contractual increases built into the budget, they are currently in negotiations with seven bargaining units.

Chairperson Lacey asked are these already agreed upon increases.

Interim Superintendent Matthew Ferron stated that step increases are budgeted at approximately \$200,000 a year on lane changes for teachers, \$780,000 of the known costs were contractual obligations.

Councilor Jane Hackett raised the issue regarding net school spending and asked if a waiver was applied for 2 years ago.

Interim Superintendent Matthew Ferron replied that a waiver was applied for, but it was not approved.

Councilor Jane Hackett commented that the denial was due to having revenues available.

Chairperson Lacey commented, that again, he thought the number was higher, and requested that they be aggressive in what they ask for and reinforce the school's needs.

Interim Superintendent Matthew Ferron stated that right off the bat \$400,000 is to be added to the School Budget. This is the high level view and they would like to keep this as much a dialogue as possible. This is due to loss of Federal Job Grants, budget drivers, personnel, and energy mandates from State and Federal Government. Three (3%) percent increase in transportation and the biggest loss this year is \$1M to fund teaching positions.

On the first page of FY13 School Department Level Service Budget Projection which shows current FY2012 compared to proposed FY13 Budget. It was requested that the school department provide the same type of document each year.

On the second page, first line, the main reason for the indicated increase of almost \$88,000 is for an Autism Specialist, they have to roll into the Operating Budget because the grant does not exist any longer. It was noted by Mr. Ferron that the bottom line requested is \$2.994M.

Mr. Ferron noted that an increase for Academy is for \$87000 for an Autism Specialist, of which that individual is coded from a grant and now moves to the operating budget for \$60,000 per year. He confirmed that the schools are losing much federal money.

Chairperson Lacey commented on the loss of the grant of one million dollars and asked how long has that been applied to the School Budget.

Interim Superintendent Matthew Ferron replied with one year. They have other Federal Grants over the past three (3) years and they were aware that this loss was coming.

Chairperson Lacey asked if the numbers reflect the absorption of this is in the 2013 budget.

Interim Superintendent Matthew Ferron replied in the affirmative.

Chairperson Lacey stated he had the opportunity to view comparable communities and Weymouth is the only community that has spent less. It is on average 15-20 %. We also had close to \$4 million free cash going into 2013 and that is money left on the table and we are still at a deficit for Net School Spending and he notes his concern with this.

Interim Superintendent Matthew Ferron responded that he per pupil expenditure formula is net school spending amount in addition to the grant. 4.4 million was received in grants; added to budget but divided by the number of students to arrive at per pupil expenditure.

Chairperson Lacey said there is not one other community on this list that have not vested an increase in the last four (4) years.

Ms. Belmarsh responded that the town is limited as to how much we get in. We have sufficient funds to get where we need to be. Property taxes are not the only revenue which should be explored.

Interim Superintendent Mathew Ferron commented we are in line with Abington home values.

Chairperson Lacey commented that there is a state mandate that we are not meeting.

Councilor Harrington agrees that all other communities pay more into their schools because they have more money; he suggests the need for an override.

Councilor Hackett said she was opposed the budget two years ago publicly and privately with the Mayor. There was money on the table and she attempted to allocate more funding to the schools and it didn't occur. She cites that it isn't only the tax piece but questioned if the administration is going to set education as a high priority. The need to capture new growth potential along Route 18, in addition to administration prioritizing was raised by Councilor Hackett.

Discussion surrounding the configuration of the middle schools was brought up by Ms. Belmarsh who stressed that we have to put the middle schools back to the 5-8 configuration, and we have to know we can maintain it and sustain it and not struggle to maintain it.

Councilor Hackett stated there is a need to relook at the configurations, because there are problems at Chapman School.

Interim Superintendent Matthew Ferron confirmed that they are looking at changes. Two years ago the schools had 21 more teachers than today. A lot of work has been absorbed by other employees to carry that caseload. There are too many pupils per class for that age group.

Ms. Belmarsh stated the importance of investing in our town. More property could be developed in order to invest for long term solutions. We need to identify the open space and upgrade commercial properties with standing.

FUNDING OF ATHLETICS AT HIGH SCHOOL

Chairperson Lacey noted that this topic is a top priority before the School Committee and Town Council.

Interim Superintendent Matthew Ferron states in the present budget they have been working off of \$100,000 towards Athletics: It takes \$400,000 to run the program and what it takes in through contributions and fund raisers have been the life line of the program.

Councilor Jane Hackett requested a breakdown of each sub category of gate fees etc.

Interim Superintendent Matthew Ferron stated he would forward to Mrs. Hachey tomorrow.

Chairperson Lacey stated that a loss of sports at the high school would devalue our school system. He suggests appropriating the money with the \$57M, including the \$400,000 and noted that this amount is a small operating percentage which reaps the benefits of contributions into the program.

Councilor Jane Hackett questioned if there was any reduction in the Athletic Program at the High School as a result of this funding.

Interim Superintendent Mathew Ferron replied no, they in fact have added Girls Hockey.

Chairperson Lacey refers to the second page of FY13 School Department Level Service Budget Projection, it is all about prioritizing the salaries of coaches, that are not being funded by town. This funding is derived from donations and gifts.

Ms. Belmarsh states this is a parallel argument under the grants that were in. The manner in which the town pays them out of our revolving account, our process has been great. These salaries are in the contract and it is not illegal regarding the accounting of the funds. She feels the School Committee should consider funding the entire salary cost of coaches from their budgets.

Chairperson Lacy noted that the School Committee should consider funding athletic salaries from their budget. He feels that we are too reliant on grants and revolving accounts, and boosters and in this economy there is only so much to give.

Ms. Belmarsh replied that she agrees that the Music Dept. has been decimated and competes for this money. CTE is struggling and competing for funding too.

Chairperson Lacey reviewed the process of how the School Committee builds their budget and submits to the Mayor. The Mayor submits to the Town Council. The Town Council votes either up or down on the budget. The Town Council can only decrease and cannot increase budget funding and send back to the Mayor.

Chairperson Lacey stated his intent is to work with everyone and advocate, help, or consult. This has been a very informative open dialogue this evening.

UPDATE ON SEARCH FOR SUPERINTENDENT

Gail Sheehan stated they are putting together a search committee, she apologizes on behalf of Sean Guilfoyle who could not be here, he was sick. On the school's website there is a section pertaining to the superintendent search –as to qualities, suggestions in the search and she encourages participation. The subcommittee met approximately three times. Based on their instructions they arrived at a recommendation for the new committee.

Chairperson Lacey questioned how long the search process will take.

Gail Sheehan responded that the process should be done hopefully by the second week in April.

Councilor Molisse asked if there are 13 members and wondered why so many.

Chairperson Lacey asked if the selection or placement be in completed in April.

Gail Sheehan responded that 3 applicants will be recommended to the School Committee for final decision.

At 8:45 PM there being no further business, A MOTION was made by Councilor Jane Hackett to ADJOURN and was seconded by Councilor Molisse and unanimously voted.

Respectfully submitted by,
Ann Flynn Dickinson, Recording Secretary

Approved by Chairman Thomas J. Lacey