

**TOWN COUNCIL MINUTES
BUDGET/MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE
Town Hall Council Chambers
APRIL 29, 2008**

Present: Kenneth J. DiFazio, Chairperson
Arthur Mathews
Michael Molisse
Patrick O'Connor
Kevin Whitaker

Also Present: Robert Conlon, Councilor
Maureen Duffy, Town Auditor
Ed Harrington, Councilor
Thomas J. Lacey, Councilor
Mary Jo Livingstone, Superintendent of Schools

Recording Secretary: Janet Murray

Chairperson DiFazio called the Budget/Management Committee meeting to order at 6:45 PM

Review/Discussion on School Department Detailed Budget with School Superintendent, Assistant Superintendents and Senior Staff

Deliberate the following measure: 08 026Z-Schools

Councilor DiFazio asked why there was an \$1800 discrepancy between the original budget book (\$54,640,043) and the most recent budget book (\$54,641,844). Ms. Livingstone stated that she was not certain what caused this. She noted that Mr. Wilson went on vacation before she could confirm the cause of this discrepancy. She stated that the number submitted was the number in MUNIS. Councilor DiFazio stated that this should be reconciled.

Ms. Livingstone gave a presentation regarding the budget for the school department. She noted that the budget being presented is 2% below level funding from FY 2008.

Ms. Livingston stated that there are budget "drivers" such as step increases and lane changes, even though agreements have not yet been made on the teacher's contract. There are eight (8) bargaining units in the town who have yet to reach settlements. Increases have also occurred in utilities, and transportation. Although these are not exactly fixed costs, they must be addressed in the budget.

The initial budget figure for FY 09 was \$57,300,000 and included the increases and staffing and programming.

Ms. Livingston stated that operational and support, and instructional expenses amount to approximately \$11 million on the expense side, however, \$6 million is special education, so there is not a lot of room for reductions. Payroll entails 80% of the budget.

Ms. Livingstone stated that at this time there are 26 planned retirements. She stated that some will need to be replaced depending on the specialty that a teacher had. A \$2.7 million reduction could not be achieved without eliminating 29.5 positions.

Councilor Whitaker asked about anticipated retirements and how many are educators and how many are administrators.

Councilor Mathews asked if the oil tanks are filled prior to contract re-negotiation. Ms. Livingstone stated that this is already being done.

Ms. Livingston stated that supplemental funding to restore line items is anticipated; however money will be pulled from the expense line if supplemental funds are not forthcoming in November/December.

Instructional materials will be cut \$357,000. Ms. Livingston noted that textbooks, assessments, and gifted and talented programs will be cut before cutting personnel. She also noted that professional development has been cut from the operating budget other than what is contractually required. There has been a reduction to special education as there is a continual recalculation for out of district placements and specialized services.

Councilor DiFazio asked for clarification on the instructional material cuts. Ms. Livingstone stated that there is a curriculum cycle such that textbooks do not become outdated. She stated that the plan had called for the purchase of new foreign language texts.

Ms. Livingstone noted that there are layoffs. Three curriculum directors' positions will be eliminated through the retirement process. There are currently five positions but once the directors retire there will only be two. She also stated that the Assistant Special Education Director position has been eliminated and the directorship of two alternative programs will be combined. Additionally a number of other positions will be redefined.

Ms. Livingstone stated that the paraprofessional contract is structured in such a way that there is no designation as to high school, security, or any specific position. The layoffs will be seniority based.

Mr. Conlon asked if a security position will be eliminated. Ms. Livingstone stated that she did not think that would happen. Three teacher positions will be eliminated.

A compliance review for special education is on schedule for September.

Councilor O'Connor asked about the three curriculum coordinator positions being eliminated. Ms. Livingston noted that the two positions which remain will be combined as ELA/Social Studies and Science/Math. The individuals in these two remaining positions each have expertise in both skill areas.

Councilor DiFazio asked about the accreditation issues that were brought to light during that process. Ms. Livingston stated that the high school has a warning of accreditation issues--

specifically regarding internal assessment of whether students who have graduated have achieved what the school system had set as far as goals.

School Committee member, James Lockhead stated that there is concern on the school committee that there are many teachers at the high school level with less than three years of experience. The concern is that with the elimination of the curriculum coordinators, the mentoring of these young teachers will be limited.

Councilor Harrington asked if step increases can be denied. Ms. Livingston stated that she is certain that we cannot deny step increases.

Councilor Mathews stated that he had a constituent call regarding hiring teachers at higher pay scales. Ms. Livingstone stated that she does not generally hire professional staff at step 1. She noted that it takes 3-4 years to develop the pedagogy to become a good teacher. If a teacher is hired with several years of teaching experience, they would be hired at step 4. She stated that this is a philosophical decision.

Councilor Mathews asked for an analysis of new hires from the past 2-3 years as to hiring rates.

Ms. Livingstone stated that there are 200 teachers at the high school; 100 (equates to ½) of teachers have less than 3 years experience.

Councilor Lacey asked about hiring experienced people. Ms. Livingstone stated that as an example a literacy specialist must have experience, therefore, their pay rate would be higher.

Councilor Lacey asked what would happen if next year is just as bad as this year with level funding- he questioned as to how long it will take to recover. Ms. Livingstone stated that it could take six years, but she pointed out that the district has not really recovered from devastating cuts which occurred around 2000.

Councilor Mathews asked about leasing rights for businesses to put advertising signs at the fields. Ms. Livingstone stated that this has been done on a small scale and the money has gone into the athletic supply fund. It was confirmed that payments go into the athletics funds.

Councilor Whitaker raised consideration of the issues of grant reliance, future liabilities including potential mandatory full day kindergarten and expected capital improvement projects in the budget review process.

Ms. Livingstone discussed grants, how they are utilized, types of grants, and grants that are being pursued.

Ms. Livingstone pointed out that there are two prioritized capital projects, one at Chapman Middle School for exterior refacing (estimated at \$5.5 million) and one at Adams Middle School for replacement of the roof (estimated at \$800,000 or continuing repairs).

Ms. Livingstone discussed revolving accounts and timing issues.

There was discussion regarding individual schools and the various impacts that will be experienced. Ms. Livingstone pointed out that enrollment has been flat across the board.

Councilor DiFazio asked for clarification on the paraprofessionals in the kindergarten classrooms. Ms. Livingstone stated that this is true except for the Title 11 full day and the integrated special education classes. She noted that this is not ideal as most of the kindergarten classes run at about 18 students. She pointed out that the most difficult time will be at arrival and dismissal times. The building principals are aware of the situation and know that help may be needed from other staff members.

Councilor O'Connor asked about having a nurse in each school. Ms. Livingstone stated there is a nurse in each school primarily for safety reasons. She pointed out that two nurse positions are paid for through an enhanced school health grant that requires that the system is fully staffed and there is a nurse coordinator.

Ms. Livingstone pointed out that there have been increases in the following programs: bus transportation, parking fees at the high school, child care fees, and the Weycare before/after school program. The budget does not currently show an increase in sports fees as these were raised last year.

Councilor DiFazio asked what would happen if the Council did not fund additional monies when the contracts are settled. Ms. Livingstone stated that if the contracts were not approved it could be possible that the schools would not open in September. She pointed out that any projected supplemental funds would not be received until November.

Councilor Mathews suggested that the Council consider going into Executive Session at a future meeting in order to receive an update on the teacher contract negotiations.

At 10:10 pm, there being no further business, a MOTION was made by Councilor Mathews to ADJOURN and was seconded by Councilor O'Connor and UNANIMOUSLY VOTED.

Approved by: _____
Kenneth J. DiFazio, Chairperson