

Education Discussion on Proposed Southfield Legislation

Meeting, February 10, 2014

Town Hall, Mayor's Office

75 Middle Street, Weymouth, MA 02189

5:30 p.m.

PRESENT: Mayor Sue Kay; George Lane; Ken DiFazio; Jane Hackett; Becky Haugh; Bill McKinney; Michael Gallagher; Kenneth Salim; Susan Kustka, Gary Pelletier; Mickey McGonagle; Lisa Belmarsh

The Meeting was called to order at 5:35 p.m. by Mayor Kay.

Mayor Kay explained her intention to hold informational meetings with the various Town Departments to discuss the proposed Southfield Legislation.

Dr. Salim, Superintendent of Weymouth Public School, stated that they have had conversations with Starwood on projections. Their original projections had a fairly aggressive growth. Based on the U.S. Census, they projected 61 students in FY14 and an additional 55 students the following year. Starwood then provided a more updated projection based on the actual numbers of this year. Comparing this year to next year, they are looking at an increase of 25 students from this year to next year; totaling 46 students.

Dr Salim reviewed the attached document and discussions ensued:

Below are estimates of the financial impact of 25 additional students attending Weymouth Public Schools, who currently reside in Southfield:

- (1) The current estimate for school year 2013-14 for 21 students (19 in district, 1 out of district special Education and 1 out of district attending a private school) is \$266,249. Using this methodology as a basis and adding 3% for inflation, the estimated cost for 25 additional students would be \$342,796 and \$274,236 for the current students for a total of \$617,032;
- (2) Massachusetts School Building Authority uses \$2,400 per student as a cost to set up a classroom. This would translate to a total of \$60,000 (25 students x \$2,400 = \$60,000)
- (3) To provide transportation to current and additional students would require two additional buses at a cost of \$62,649 per bus for a total of \$125,298. Currently, Southfield directly provides these services through a contract;

- (4) The additional students will likely create the need for a portable classroom. The one time installation cost is \$155,000. The annual cost to lease a portable classroom is \$2,500 - \$3,000 a month. To purchase, the cost would be \$145,000 - \$160,000. Hingham Public Schools has five surplus portable classrooms. We would likely be able to purchase one of these at a cost considerably less than the cost to lease or purchase new portable classrooms.

The overall estimated cost of items one through three above is \$802,330. The cost of a portable classroom, depending on the option, is in the range of \$170,000 to \$315,000.

Lastly, Chapter 70 aid for the current students will be received during the next fiscal year (FY15). It would be provided in the following fiscal year (FY16) for any new students.

Most of the students would go to Hamilton School; however, it does not have a lot of access space. Dr. Salim talked about redistricting but it would have to shift all the way to Wessagussett; which would be a lot of work just to gain space for one extra classroom.

Under the new legislation, students in Weymouth will go to Weymouth Public Schools and the students in Rockland will go the Rockland Public Schools. It is a different arrangement because it is a small number of students now, but it is projected to grow and the students will be going to different schools.

Mayor Kay inquired if it is different because the additional children are in Southfield rather than just overall assuming more children moving to Weymouth. Dr. Salim responded that overall when students move into Weymouth homes, it tends to average out; however, Southfield is housing that has did exist before. An issue is that it takes a year for Chapter 70 reimbursement. If there is an additional 25 students, we would not receive the reimbursement until the following year.

WPS Business Manager, Mickey McGonagle, reviewed the calculations in the attachment. Mayor Kay inquired if there are no new students, because they haven't built anything and will probably take a year, are you still looking at the \$274,236 for existing students. Mr. McGonagle confirmed this.

Reviewing transportation in number three on the attachment, Mayor Kay asked about the two buses. Mr. McGonagle explained that the two buses would be added to the existing fleet and reroute the bus routes.

Bill McKinney, Town of Weymouth CFO, commented that Starwood is backing out a per pupil Chapter 70 figure, which really is not true because the way the Chapter 70 formula works, we are only getting \$25 per student. They are underestimating the cost of education.

Councilor DiFazio inquired if one additional classroom at Hamilton would be enough at full build out. Dr. Salim stated that it would not be enough and it is a short term plan. We would need a long term around the primary level, whether the legislation goes through or not. We need to have these conversations with Tri Town for the long term arrangements.

Assistant Superintendant, Susan Kutska, commented that she is worried about Special Education transportation because we already have issues with our vans.

Councilor Haugh inquired if the students in Southfield would be subjected to the \$235 bus fee. Assistant Superintendent, Gary Pelletier, believes that the Hamilton students would not be because they are less than two miles away; however, the middle school students would have to pay.

There was discussion on Starwood's projections.

Mayor Kay explained her intentions of using the minutes of these meetings as reports.

Councilor Hackett stated that we have Starwood's revised projections. The fundamental change is that the taxes are now coming to us and we are providing services. They are buying into a system that is already stressed and once they accept the fact we are stressed; they have to sure up our stress points. Mayor Kay stated that our tax dollars do not pay for our expenses, when you consider Capital and all the things we should be doing and are not.

School Committee member, Lisa Belmarsh, commented that it frustrating dealing with Tri Town and having to check every month if we got paid. The School Committee is not happy and has not been a good process. Discussion ensued.

Mayor Kay asked if we should change what exists and make it better or go for the new proposal. Councilor Hackett commented that it goes back to the stress points and we are losing a hold-harmless protection within the legislation if it goes through.

Councilor DiFazio inquired if one would want to negotiate each year, even though it is a pain, instead of saying now this is what we think it is going to cost then find out later it costs a lot more. There is a huge risk there.

Ms. Kutska stated that the biggest concern is that they will not be able to do the commercial build out initially proposed due to sewer constraints. Therefore, the projected whole process didn't work and school could not be built. However, Starwood needs more from us, more then we need from them.

Mr. Pelletier commented that the start-up costs is what we need to be concerned about. In order for us to absorb these students, we need the portable classrooms and buses. If all departments got their start-up needs right now, we'd be able to absorb any further growth from the taxes that are collected from the additional properties. Dr. Salim also commented that we would need the start-up costs to make this happen.

Council Hackett stated that Starwood is putting aside five acres for a school and believes that the land should be assured again. It is beneficial to them, because they felt that they could sell our school system and South Weymouth with a new school.

Mayor Kay brought up the question on do you renovate or Chapman or extend Abigail. Councilor Hackett believes a new school on Southfield is extremely attractive. There was discussion if it would be a K-8 or smaller school. It was originally proposed that it would be a K-8 for Southfield students only.

Michael Gallagher commented that even after start-up costs are covered, the residential tax rate would not support the build out; we will need the commercial for it to work. The initial legislation states that it cannot build beyond a certain point without providing commercial. Mr. Gallagher stated that they could leave after building residential. Jane commented that Starwood proposed a MOU for a dedicated commercial zone. She brought up that South Weymouth is attractive residentially; however, Rockland is attractive commercially. Councilor Haugh shared the attached Starwood map that shows their dedicated commercial area.

There was a discussion on the benefits of the new legislation to Starwood. Mayor Kay stated that she is trying to get as much information as possible

Ms. Belmarsh commented that it is a great opportunity that we are in the midst of trying to figure out what to do with Chapman and believe we should present it as an option. Dr. Salim stated that we have shared that idea with Matt Berry of Starwood; both new construction and renovation. While there is no commitment to a certain location, we would be interested in the idea of exploring a feasibility study on an addition to Abigail Adams, Chapman's existing location or Southfield as three possibilities. It would be a way for Starwood to actually demonstrate some commitment to the Town of Weymouth and the schools.

Mayor Kay commented that the Navy thought they needed a Fire Department with less people than they are currently projecting. She asked Dr. Salim to pull together a report of the school department needs.

Meeting adjourned at 6:40 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Casey Maloney