

Board of Selectmen's Meeting
Joint Meeting with School Committee and Finance Committee
April 3, 2013, 7:00 PM
Medway High School Library
88 Summer Street

Present: Selectman Andrew Espinosa, Chair; Selectman Glenn Trindade, Vice-Chair; Selectman Dennis Crowley; Selectman Richard D'Innocenzo; Selectman John Foresto; and Suzanne Kennedy, Town Administrator.

Also Present: Members of the School Committee and Finance Committee.

At 7:07 PM Chairman Espinosa called the meeting to order and led in the Pledge of Allegiance.

Public Comments: None.

As several groups were represented at tonight's meeting, everyone introduced themselves and their affiliations.

Judy Evans, Superintendent of Schools, stated personnel contracts were not settled until very late, making the reconfigured budget later than usual in the budget process. She distributed a number of handouts featuring various aspects of the school budget.

Mr. David Verdolino distributed copies of budget information and reviewed the sheet step by step, moving from the FY2013 School Operating Budget to how the schools moved through the present school year. It was noted that the Board of Selectmen Budget Policy issued in December was revised in January. When the policy was revised, raising the allocation, the schools prioritized their capital requests instead of finding ways to just spend the extra money. An additional \$124,332 went to capital items.

Mr. Verdolino continued, stating they would have presented that budget, but then the school committee was asked to increase use of circuit breaker funding and use of the reserve. He noted that this budget reflects a 1% increase from FY13. The anticipated Annual Town Meeting appropriation is \$24,143,552. The \$25,563,813 budget would include funds from all funding sources.

Dr. Evans pointed out that the reverse side of the handout features a summary of a three-year plan of capital improvement. Some items were crossed off because they have been accomplished through various means, such as inclusion in Middle School Repair Project using leftover funds. Dr. Evans emphasized that this budget will meet the needs of both students and staff. At this time she asked those assembled if there were any questions.

Ms. Christine Devine, Finance Committee, asked if there was concern about using components of the circuit breaker and school choice funds to support energy costs or other recurring expense from reserves that will ultimately disappear. Dr. Evans responded that what the schools spend is based on enrollment and associated needs. Circuit breaker and school choice funds are sources that had

fluctuated a lot the past few years. Circuit breaker for next year is based on what was spent on special education this year. The costs can vary from approximately \$40,000 per student to over \$100,000, depending on student needs and placement. Regarding school choice, Ms. Evans added that she anticipates the committee will open 80 slots for school choice for next year. This is possible due to decreasing class sizes at present.

Selectman Trindade asked how the school choice money comes in. Dr. Evans responded that it is received on a quarterly basis. Mr. Verdolino added that the first installment is at the end of December, with subsequent installments in March and June. Dr. Evans pointed out that transportation costs for students is approximately half a million dollars with no reimbursement. Discussion followed.

Chairman Espinosa asked if \$24,143,552 was a good starting point for next year with the assumption that additional funds will come through. It was noted that it is impossible to know for sure because some of those are unknown. Chairman Espinosa clarified that reallocated budget changes will occur in the fall at the beginning of the school year. Mr. Verdolino stated the baseline is what the schools use going forward, and this year's revenue was \$24,143,552. When the other revenue sources come through, the anticipated total may be closer to \$25,563,813.

Ms. Debora Trindade, School Committee, pointed out that the initial exploration of budgeting factors in student enrollment, past expenses, student needs, transportation, costs, to name a few. The Board of Selectmen's policy is not the starting point, but the schools get there after their own investigation. Another School Committee member reminded everyone that the per-student special education costs can range from \$40,000 to \$200,000 and it is difficult to anticipate with any degree of accuracy until those individual students are identified as part of the student population. There are also transitional needs which will shift as student matriculates through a particular program or placement. Ms. Trindade added that, if the housing market should perk up, a lot of "empty nesters" with 3-bedroom homes will put their homes up for sale, and families will move into the district.

Selectman Crowley described the historical process of looking at a previous year's budget, considering steps and lanes for staff, and evaluating actual expenses for things like energy that are not based on student enrollment. The original budget was \$24,601,145 before the Board of Selectmen revised its policy. He theorized that salary increases could represent another \$500,000 due to changes in steps and lanes in addition to increased energy costs.

Mr. Jeff O'Neill, Finance Committee, noted that the Town side is increasing in staff this year, while the school has remained fairly consistent. Chairman Espinosa stated it is important to understand the way the pie is cut today may not be the way it will be cut in the coming years. It is conceivable that either the schools or the Town may have to give up something in favor of the other, if budgetary compromises cannot be achieved. Recurring expenses can be problematic if significant changes are not tracked throughout the year. Selectman Crowley theorized that circuit breaker funds are basically replaced from year to year while other sources of revenue may fluctuate more.

Discussion followed on continuing changes in technology, increased security needs, and instructional programs. Dr. Evans stated that, given the available resources, the teachers have done a fantastic job. Currently the schools are tapping into school choice money to develop some initiatives. Reasonable class sizes have been instrumental in increased academic performance, and sometimes those results are not necessarily known until years later. They start with basic needs pitted against available revenues and develop a plan. We think our programs have been adequately funded, while other area communities have

schools with larger class sizes. Ms. Deb Trindade stated that a list of those initiatives could be found on page 2 of the handout entitled Proposed Budget for FY2014.

Ms. Devine noted that special education expenses seem to increase at a much more accelerated rate than other expenses. Dr. Evans clarified that a few of the students' costs have increased due to the nature of their disability. Once a student is placed, the parent has the right to keep the student there regardless of costs. Transportation is increasing because of fuel costs and salaries for drivers. Home-based services have been reduced by about half. There is support for an educational model where more inclusion is being encouraged rather than pulling students out for services. By instituting programs for small groups of students with similar needs, those students are able to mainstream more efficiently, thereby preventing out-of-district placements.

Regarding student placements, the law states that parents have the final say on where the student is placed. There are various kinds of placements, long-term or a 45-day diagnostic placement. School phobia is one of the fastest growing areas and schools are having a hard time keeping up. Dr. Evans emphasized there is support from teachers, psychologists and paraprofessionals. Should this particular program continue to grow, it will have to be built more solidly into the budget.

Mr. Kevin Dickie, Finance Committee, noted that he is very interested in technology and keeping it up-to-date. Dr. Evans briefly reviewed the concept of a shared technology director that was proposed by the Town, and Mr. Boucher has added a level of energy and enthusiasm into the schools with the advent of updated equipment which enhances use of educational software and media. The schools would like to add another K-12 technology assistant who would not be a fix-it person but someone who understands the technology and associated educational software programs. This individual would be shared by the Town departments, though the school department would fund them. Dr. Evans added that they are also looking at various kinds of tablets or notebook computers, whether to allow students to bring their own devices, and other approaches to equipment. It is difficult to know how technology will evolve over time, and how that will impact student needs. She noted that sometimes they have to make a decision to fund equipment purchases outside of the capital programs because the need is urgent. Discussion followed.

Chairman Espinosa suggested that budgets should have a line item for recurring or staggered replacement of these kinds of items in order to fiscally accommodate for the purchases. It was noted that these kinds of purchases were often sacrificed in favor of basic educational supplies when the economy turned downward.

MSBA Statement of Interest:

Dr. Evans stated that MSBA has funded the Middle School Repair Project, and periodically MSBA gives notice that there will be a small window of opportunity where other school projects can be submitted. School districts are invited to tell the MSBA about any deficiencies in any other school in the district. For example, the McGovern School needs windows, plumbing and other improvements. The current window of opportunity for applications closes on April 10. The MSBA looks at all the submissions and determines who has the greatest need. A site visit is scheduled to assess current conditions. Then the authority considers how much money it has to allocate. The intent now is to submit for the McGovern School, which is a very old school with some basic needs. She noted that the windows have been on the CIPC wish list for a number of years.

Dr. Evans respectfully asked that the Board of Selectmen and School Committee both vote to support the submission of this application. Doing so places no one under obligation but is a placeholder for potential future projects. Discussion followed.

Selectman Crowley expressed disappointment that there had been no advance notice of this item until it was included in the BOS meeting packet for April 1. There was no indication of how it would be funded, i.e., override or other funding option. Dr. Evans responded that the application specifically states that the applicant is not to get estimates or any quotes, but rather to list the things that need attention or replacement. Dollar amounts are not to be considered for purposes of the application. MSBA will decide which of the things on the list will be funded at the standard reimbursement rate.

Selectman Foresto admitted it is difficult to refuse a project with a potential 50% reimbursement rate. He cautioned that, at Town Meeting, residents may pick and choose between projects and something like this could be defeated in favor of something else.

Selectman Trindade moved that the Board of Selectmen support the application as presented this evening; Selectman D’Innocenzo seconded. No discussion. VOTE: 5-0-0.

Brief discussion followed on how the Burke School is presently being utilized.

For the benefit of the Finance Committee, Selectman Crowley reported that the Middle School Repair Project is six months ahead of schedule and under budget. He estimated that there could be \$50,000 left in the budget. The Building Committee is gathering prices with the idea of possibly paving all three parking lots with the leftover funds.

At 8:40 PM Selectman Trindade moved to adjourn; Selectman Crowley seconded. No discussion. VOTE: 5-0-0.

Respectfully submitted,
Jeanette Galliardt
Night Board Secretary