

Sturbridge Finance Committee
Meeting Minutes
March 30, 2011
Town Hall
7:00 pm

Amended 4/7/11—motion to approve minutes with amendments made by MR, seconded by SA. Vote 6-0-1(LM).

Meeting was called to order at 7:05 pm with the following members present: Kevin Smith (KS), Mary Redetzke (MR), Arnold Wilson (AW), Prescott (Scott) Arndt (SA), Richard Volpe (RV) and Mike Serio (MS).

Members Absent: Larry Morrison (LM), Patricia Affenito (PA), Robert Williams (RW).

Invited guests: Dan Durgin (DD), Superintendent of Schools; Dan Carlson (DC), Principal of Burgess Elementary School; Deb Boyd (DB), Business Manager.

Other interested parties: Kate Alexander (KA), chair of the Burgess School Cmte, Pat Barnicle (PB), Burgess School Cmte member.

The guests were asked to discuss the addition of full-day Kindergarten to the FY12 budget. DD supplied and explained a worksheet that outlined the costs and expenses of the expanded program to the Town beginning in FY12. The take-away, according to the DD, DB and KA, is the program essentially pays for itself.

General discussion about the proposal and the benefits to the town and the students:

KA and DD state that surveys were used to gauge interest (a statistically narrow sample was used-only Sturbridge households with preschool-aged or younger children were chosen), DD says additional data related to this issue were studied; the fact that a large majority (81%) of school in Massachusetts have full-day Kindergarten was a determining factor. DD makes the statement that \$62,000 is not much money. KS counters that while that is true, this figure is not static-it will increase each year. DB states that it will be offset by the Foundation Budget funds. DC makes the case that full-day Kindergarten has many more benefits than just more socialization; academic time in school is more than doubled, and so disadvantaged students have opportunities they would not otherwise. DD and DC outline the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks-the core subjects are math, English-language arts, social studies, and science. There are additional frameworks for other subjects such as gym and music. All school officials and school cmte members repeatedly make the point that, in their opinion, this program essentially pays for itself with the addition of the Foundation Budget monies based on full-day FTEs.

Questions from the board:

SA-do the salaries reflect benefits?

DD-no.

MR- has a fee structure been explored?

DD, DB, KA all emphatically state their aversion to a program with fees. DD and KA use anecdotal information to make the case that charging fees will discriminate against those unable to pay. DB goes on to say that in her experience when a child leaves Burgess to attend a full-day program, that child is not likely to return, since friendships have been made. DD makes the statement that this program will be implemented whether the Fin Comm votes to approve the addition of full-day kindergarten to the Burgess budget for FY12. KA refuses to answer the question about how the program would be funded if the requested funds are not approved.

MR-how likely is the State to pull funding from the program?

DB-highly unlikely, since 81% of schools have this program.

DC-because of the benefits to under-privileged children, funding will likely stay in the State budget.

KS-will Burgess open to school choice?

KA, PB-no.

RV-once the \$130,000 grant is spent it is gone, correct?

KA, PB-yes. DB states that this grant will allow the district to hire staff rather than needing to use it to recover staff let go to balance a budget.

Questions from others:

PB-why is this program being pulled out for scrutiny?

KS-This is now part of the town budget and so should be reviewed and evaluated by the Fin Comm.

PB-Fin Comm should focus on the money, not on the reasoning behind the proposal.

KS-as board members, we need to be able to explain votes on the issues that affect the Town's budget.

KA-why are we here defending this proposal?

KS-this is a new item to the budget.

Tantasqua JHS Roof Replacement:

KS-why is the second option for replacement so much higher (almost 50%) for only a gain of 10 years in the life of the roof?

DD-the project is expected to cost \$1.1 million; SBA is paying a portion (52%??), with the district borrowing \$300,00 and using \$205,000 from the school choice program. DB makes the point that this will be a five-year note, no bonds will be issued.

KS-what is the lifespan of the rest of the building after this replacement?

DD-possibly 30-40 yrs. The building is almost 50 years old now.

All non-Fin Comm board members leave the meeting at 8:25 pm.

General discussion about whether to send additional questions to DD, DC, DB, and KA.
Meeting adjourned at 8:47 pm.