

Members Present: John E. Arnold, Chair, Ed Behn, Peter Allen, Bill Linnane, Jo Lown, Kathy Rosenblum Senie, J. J. Malone, Lisa Blazejewski. Absent: Jim Tepper.

At 7:00 p.m. Mr. Arnold called the meeting to order in the Selectmen's Meeting Room.

Mr. Arnold reminded residents that Town Meeting will be held Saturday, March 17th at 1:00 p.m. at Westborough High School.

Call to Order/Open Forum

There were no requests to address the Committee.

Preparation for FY2013 Annual Town Meeting School Committee/School Superintendent

School Superintendent Marianne O'Connor and School Committee Chair Karen Henderson appeared before the Committee to present this budget and related articles (Draft Warrant #7, Articles 15 & 16). Also present were School Committee members Bruce Tretter, Steven Doret, Ilyse Levine-Kanji, Jodie Hensley, and Irene Oliver, the new Director of Finance. Ms. O'Connor reviewed some highlights and achievements of the School District during the past year. She also outlined various cost-saving measures the School Department had implemented, such as "Virtual Backpacks" to save on paper, making report cards and progress reports available online to save on postage, re-aligning bus routes for greater efficiency, and reducing the number of trash pick-ups through increased recycling. Ms. Henderson noted that the teachers' union contract was settled last spring, after Town Meeting, but the School Department absorbed the extra costs within the existing budget rather than coming to Fall Town Meeting for more funds. This year the contracts are scheduled for a 1.25% increase. Ms. O'Connor pointed out that, over the last five years (FY08-FY12), 33 staff positions (FTEs) have been lost, while the student population has grown by 70. Westborough is fairly average in the number of students requiring special education, but has more students requiring language services. There was some discussion of the strain put on teachers and resources due to Westborough's dynamic school population (students coming and going within the school year).

Ms. Henderson explained that the School Committee had asked for a level-services budget. The School Department's budget, initially submitted as a 5.16% increase, was finally cut to a 3.25% increase. Ms. O'Connor outlined the impact on programs and services of the cuts, and noted that each school had lost something in order to meet the reduction goal. There was a total staff reduction of 2.7 FTE, and a total addition of 3.4 FTE, for a net increase of .7 district-wide. Ms. Henderson noted the further reductions in the areas of facilities, utilities, technology, supplies and materials, textbooks, athletics, fine arts, and the increase of fees to families. There was some discussion of the impact of out-of-district costs on tuitions, which are increasing even as the number of students going out-of-district decreases (this year 3 students are being brought back into the district). Ms. O'Connor explained that some special education transportation and program costs are shared with other districts in a collaborative, resulting in some savings. Ms. Henderson noted the School Committee's total budget figure of \$41,492,000. However, the Committee has raised some fees and, after deducting those fees, the final total the School Committee is asking the Town to raise and appropriate is \$41,282,909. Ms. Henderson added that state and federal funding, including circuit breaker monies and funds for special education, has gone or been reduced, a loss of \$676,475.

Ms. O'Connor explained that additional annual reporting required by the State of the schools is a new mandate that requires staffing with hours of extra work. The latest mandate, the Homeless Transportation Act, requires the Town to provide transportation for eligible students at a cost of \$98,000 per year. Ms. Henderson noted that Westborough and similar towns, which have many motels and hotels, are unfairly singled out by this mandate, while other towns with no such housing are not burdened with these costs. Regarding the Chapter 70 Education Fund, Ms. Henderson explained that Westborough receives \$1,240 per student, while surrounding communities get much more. The state has acknowledged that the funding mechanism is unfair, but additional funds have not been forthcoming. Mr. Doret distributed a chart showing that, in his opinion, the school budget increases are doing better on average than the town as a whole.

Mr. Behn noted that insurance is one of the biggest growth factors in the Town, and pointed out that if the estimated school-related insurance amounts are added to the school budget amounts, the increase in the cost of educating Westborough students is approximately 3.67%. Mr. Arnold felt that in order to be fair, the total cost of services for each department would also have to include insurance and debt or, at least, a similar school and non-school comparison. Mr. Malone noted that the School Department budget had the bulk of the Town's spending increases, and wondered if the school budget booklet was available, which would show more detail. He also would like to see the breakdown of teaching staff by step. Ms. Henderson noted that about 2/3 of staff were on the top step. In answer to Mr. Allen's query regarding contract custodial work, Ms. O'Connor noted that daytime custodians are essential, adding that each school employee has to undergo a CORI check. However, savings are being made in evening custodial staffing by not using fill-in staff and cutting back on some shifts. Mr. Allen asked what the impact would be of having no increase to the budget whatever, and Mr. Doret responded that the department had provided a budget which maintains the quality of Westborough's schools in spite of the decrease in state aid.

Mr. Linnane commended the School Committee for their presentation and wondered if the Town should consider suing the state regarding the shortfall in Chapter 70 funding. Ms. O'Connor noted that the Superintendent's team and other groups are looking into ways to pursue improvements in Chapter 70 funding. Mr. Behn agreed something should be done regarding Chapter 70 monies, and noted that Westborough's commercial/industrial tax base had in part offset the impact on homeowners of the Chapter 70 shortfall. He felt the schools did an outstanding job developing citizenship and character in Westborough's students, but noted that high taxes prevented many people from living here. Mr. Doret reiterated that the Finance Committee's goal is often to contain costs, but the School Committee's goal would always be to deliver the best education possible with the funds under its control. He noted that if the department didn't have to compensate for the Federal and State funding shortfall of \$1 million, there would be a budget decrease. Ms. Lown added that the School Department budget had no significant surplus, and felt that this department dealt directly with the quality of life and the future of the community through its service to children. When the school's budget is cut, it impacts one whole year of a child's life. Mr. Doret pointed out that eventually the department would reach the limit of cost-savings. Ms. O'Connor added that the next level of cutting would then be staffing, which impacts class size, which impacts performance. Ms. Rosenblum Senie commended the School Department and School Committee for seeking the right balance between providing excellent educational services and being responsible regarding the impact on taxpayers. Ms. Blazejewski thanked the School Committee for their insights and felt Westborough schools provided a public education equal to private schools.

Article 15. Gibbons School Architectural Services (\$200,000). Ms. O'Connor noted that this project had stalled a few years ago and is a project that is going through the Massachusetts School Building Authority in order to be eligible for 40-60% reimbursement from the state. This project is now back on the list for approval. Money left over from a Hastings school project (\$158,569) will also be used, as well as \$175,000 which was appropriated when the project was initiated. Mr. Doret explained that these funds

will provide for the hiring of a Construction Manager who will oversee the entire process. He added that as much work as the state will allow for reimbursement is being included in this project. Ms. O'Connor gave a ballpark estimate for the project of \$7-9 million. Mr. Malone felt this was likely to require a debt exclusion, and noted that other major town projects, such as \$30 million for the Fire Station, Forbes Building and Town Hall, are also coming up.

Article 16: Engineering Services (\$40,000). Ms. O'Connor explained that these funds would pay for a professional Engineer to study all school facilities and determine what the priorities should be for the Capital Expenditure Plan. Mr. Arnold felt this action might provide a model for the town as a whole in helping all Town departments estimate reasonable costs and setting priorities.

Mr. Arnold noted that, after Town Meeting, it might be useful to have further discussion with the School Committee regarding efficiency in public education, and understanding the School Committee's expectations for the next five years.

Open Space Preservation Committee

Tim Dodd, Open Space Preservation Committee Chair, appeared before the Committee to present this article (Draft Warrant #7, Article 33). Beth Travis, Recreation Commission Chair, was also present. Mr. Dodd explained that the Open Space Committee has worked since 1987 to retain, preserve, and acquire open space in Westborough. An open space plan is required in order to qualify for grant funding, and this plan must be updated every 5 years. Mr. Dodd noted that the plan includes a history as well as an inventory of open spaces in Westborough. His purpose in bringing the article to Town Meeting is to solicit comments from the community, since technically the plan does not require approval at Town Meeting. There will be a meeting on Monday, February 27th at 7:00 p.m. (which will be broadcast on cable TV as well) where the plan will be explained by the Committee and representative from the state agency that works with towns on their plans. Mr. Dodd explained that the last plan was updated in 2003 but expired – from an eligibility for grants point-of-view – in 2008. There was some discussion of the plan's availability on the Town's website, and the feature which allows comments to be posted online. The Open Space Committee welcomes comments from a wide variety of residents on their use of open space.

Discussion/Deliberation of Budgets and Warrant Articles

Discussion will be deferred to Monday's meeting. Mr. Arnold asked the Committee to look through the Warrant article and Budget spreadsheets and note where further discussion or meetings with departments are necessary.

Schedule of meetings planned through March 2012

Mr. Arnold noted the meetings scheduled for Monday and Thursday of next week.

Chairman, Committee Liaison, and Department Liaison Reports

Mr. Arnold noted that the Board of Selectmen had approved the Committee's recommended wording change for the Reserve Fund article, but the vote was 3-2. He felt that, if the Committee wanted the same wording next year, a Citizens Petition might be a better way to proceed since 10 signatures/addresses on a citizens request must be placed on the Annual Town Meeting warrant and does not need the approval of the Selectmen. Mr. Malone pointed out that the wording in the motion was unchanged. Mr. Arnold noted that the motions have been drafted by Jim Malloy and, therefore, the motion document notes the motion that the Town Manager prefers.

Mr. Arnold asked the Committee to think about what they would like to include in a brief statement for distribution in a document to be given to voters at the Town election. Mr. Arnold will draft a statement

for Committee review and, when we have consensus, will forward the statement to Town Moderator, Joe Harrington.

Ms. Blazejewski is waiting to hear from the Historical Commission regarding the secretary wages.

Ms. Rosenblum Senie will write up a report of her informative meeting with Linda Strand, Executive Director of the Westborough Housing Authority.

Mr. Behn will ask Treasurer/Collector Joanne Savignac what the borrow effect will be now that numbers are final.

Ms. Lown reviewed the accounting notes she had emailed to the Committee regarding the \$40,000 difference in the Country Club budget, Encumbrances in the year-end appropriation and expenditures reports, and the Water & Sewer Indirect and STP debt numbers in the Recap spreadsheet.

Comments and Concerns of Committee Members

Mr. Linnane and Mr. Behn noted the excellent job Mr. Arnold did at the Board of Selectmen's meeting.

Mr. Arnold felt that Town Counsel Greg Franks' views should be sought on the impact of the various bylaw changes contained in the Warrant. Ms. Lown noted Mr. Malloy's statement under Article 25 that only a limited number of bylaws are enforceable through non-criminal disposition, and felt it would be useful to have a list of those bylaws.

Adjournment

Mr. Behn moved to adjourn the meeting at 9:55 p.m. Vote to adjourn was 8 in favor, with 8 being present.

Document List

Homeless Transportation 2011-2012 spreadsheet (School Department).

Normalized Data Westborough School District chart, prepared by Steve Doret.

Town of Westborough Open Space Preservation Committee presentation, prepared by Tim Dodd.

AFC questions for School Committee, email from J. E. Arnold to Karen Henderson.

2012 ATM Motions Draft.

2012 ATM Warrant Final.

Lease vs. Purchase spreadsheet.

Warrant Article Summary spreadsheet, ATM FY13, v. 11.