

Members Present: Ed Behn, Chair, Gary Wells, Lisa Blazejewski, Peter Allen. Hank Rauch, John E. Arnold, Kathy Rosenblum Senie. Absent: Sharon Kaiser, Jim Tepper.

At 7:10 p.m. Mr. Behn called the meeting to order in Room 23 of the Forbes Building.

#### **Call to Order/Open Forum**

There were no requests to address the Committee.

#### **Approval of Minutes**

##### **Meeting No. 22, February 20, 2014**

Mr. Behn, Mr. Allen, and Ms. Blazejewski requested corrections to the minutes. Mr. Wells moved to accept the minutes as amended. The vote to approve the minutes is 4 in favor and 3 abstentions (Arnold, Rauch, Rosenblum Senie) with 7 being present.

#### **Review of the FY15 School Department Budget:**

School Superintendent, Marianne O'Connor, Director of School Finance and Administration, Irene Oliver, and School Committee Chair, Ilyse Levine-Kanji, along with School Committee Vice-Chair, Stephen Doret, and School Committee members Nicole Sullivan, Karen Henderson, and School Committee candidate, George Thompson, met with the Committee to discuss the FY15 School Department budget. Ms. O'Connor said that the budget process takes several months and acknowledged that the School Committee plays a big role in helping to establish the budget. Ms. O'Connor recognized that the School budget is large for the Town and pointed out that they deal with approximately 3,600 students, 560 employees, and manage 6 buildings. Ms. O'Connor mentioned that the School Department deals with "human beings" and pointed out the achievements of the Westborough Public Schools including being ranked 17<sup>th</sup> in the state by Boston Magazine, dramatic increases in MCAS scores, and high percentiles in graduation rates (99.2% graduate from high school), along with the high percentile of Westborough high school graduates that go on to attend college (96%). Ms. O'Connor also pointed out the numerous achievements by Westborough students in Athletics as well as Fine Arts. Regarding Technology, Ms. O'Connor mentioned some milestones such as the introduction of Google Apps for Education at Westborough High School and the Gibbons Middle School; use of Chromebooks, iPads, and interactive whiteboards; and the expansion of IParent so parents can view report cards online. Ms. O'Connor pointed out that with the increased technology comes the need for more bandwidth and security.

Ms. O'Connor reviewed the "Percent by School for Selected Populations". Across all 6 schools, there is approximately 20% of the student base whose first language is not English, and that figure doesn't include limited proficiency in English which accounts for about another 10% of the student population. When compared to school districts in the immediate area, Ms. O'Connor said Westborough was way above surrounding towns when looking at educating non-English or limited English speaking students. However, she noted that Special Education (SPED) enrollment were below the state average. Ms. O'Connor pointed out that the schools are restructuring some of their resources so SPED students can stay within the district, since sending a SPED student out of the district can range in cost from \$35,000 to \$250,000 a year. Ms. O'Connor mentioned the low income population and said that requests for free and reduced lunches have increased, along with parents looking for scholarships for full day kindergarten. Ms. O'Connor spoke about the projected enrollment of new students for 2014-2015. She is in constant contact with Town Planner, Jim Robbins, regarding the new apartment complexes (Toll Brothers and Westborough Woods) and the possible number of additional students that could move in to town and register for school in Westborough. Mr. Doret brought up the Gibbons school renovation, since additional students will put pressure on the schools. Ms. O'Connor said she has a call in to the Massachusetts School Building Authority (MSBA) regarding the Gibbons project because when they first started thinking about renovation plans, these developments hadn't been planned yet. Now there's some question as to whether they should continue thinking about renovating Gibbons or consider a new school.

Ms. O'Connor touched upon some of the challenges and unfunded demands the schools are facing. There has been a reduction in state and federal grants over the past few years, but new standards and mandates have been issued that result in additional costs to the school district. For example, Ms. O'Connor pointed out the Sheltered English Emersion mandates that require training and re-licensure for teachers and administrators. Ms. O'Connor also mentioned the changing student demographics and the need for personnel with specialized skills to work with SPED students with more intense needs. Regarding transportation, Mr. Doret spoke about the law requiring the town to either educate, or transport homeless students back to their old school district, of which Westborough incurs the costs with partial reimbursement from the state about a year later. Ms. O'Connor also pointed out the mandated hours of reporting and data collection that is required.

The School Department's "FY15 Budget by Category" was discussed. Some line items increased, while others decreased. Transportation was negotiated but did go up since a bus was added for one of the new developments. Salary & Wages increased due to step and cost of living increases, but contract negotiations are ongoing. Mr. Doret and Nicole Sullivan from the School Committee are involved with the contract negotiations and hope to have contracts finalized before the end of the year. Supplies and textbooks both increased. Contracted services, which includes professional dues, trash removal, insurance, etc., decreased, along with technology. Mr. Behn asked Ms. O'Connor about the National Core Curriculum and having more consistent academic guidelines with regard to materials. Ms. O'Connor said they have a part time person that keeps purchases aligned with what's required. Now that the National Core Curriculum has been adopted, it has mitigated the risk of purchasing textbooks that may not align with the national core. Ms. Blazejewski asked if in the future there will be apps to access textbooks instead of the actual book. Ms. O'Connor said they are trying to move in that direction but licensing fees are very expensive.

Ms. Levine-Kanji reviewed the New Position Requests/Reductions. She noted that there is a need to hire a Board Certified Behavioral Analyst due to an increase in the intensive SPED population. Ms. O'Connor mentioned that they are bringing back an out of district student which will result in a cost savings, despite the need to spend \$126,203 to hire an additional teacher and paraprofessional. The proposed FY15 school budget of \$43,890,311 breaks down to \$34,986,420 for Salaries and \$8,903,891 for Operations, and results in a 2.8% increase over FY14. However, these figures do not include pending salary negotiations. Ms. Levine-Kanji pointed out the percent increases to school budgets in surrounding school districts and mentioned the average increase was 7.26% over the previous year.

Ms. Levine-Kanji discussed the Cost Savings Measures by the schools. She pointed out that the School Committee and staff pulled together and completed the search for a new Superintendent themselves rather than asking for \$25,000-\$30,000 to hire someone else to do it. In addition, other cost savings included keeping supplies level or reducing expenses for materials, more utility conservation and green initiatives, less trash pick-ups, and the development of SPED programs within the district to bring back students placed out of district. Ms. Blazejewski asked about bringing more students back to the district and if they anticipated doing more of that in the future. Ms. O'Connor said their goal is to bring more students back and that over time they are building a strong foundation to handle these students. Ms. Blazejewski asked if Westborough did develop a foundation could we then take out of district students and charge a fee. Ms. O'Connor said that the schools have limited room. They have explored this possibility and would rather look at Westborough having a certain type of program and grouping students together based on their needs. Other towns could house other programs and students could be exchanged at no cost, since it would be a wash between towns. It was noted that out of district costs and circuit breaker requests are easy to determine but in-house costs may be harder to figure out. Ms. Oliver said they would have to do audits and have the SPED teachers fill out forms for reimbursement. She also mentioned that out of district costs can fluctuate if a student changes programs mid-year.

Ms. O'Connor finished her presentation by pointing out the many community service contributions by Westborough students and the contributions the school provides to the community. She felt the proposed budget would "reinforce the continued pride the community has in our dedicated professionals, our well maintained facilities, and the outstanding academic achievements of our students" while also moving "the district forward in a proactive and responsible manner" and "continuing to focus on the increased needs of our changing student population".

Mr. Behn complimented the whole team for the way the budget was assembled, since more detail was provided than in prior years. Ms. O'Connor said that was due to Ms. Oliver and her diligent work. Mr. Behn asked if there were any

other ways to offset costs and mentioned circuit breaker funds and athletic events. He also inquired if there were any metrics or policies about using revolving funds. Mr. Behn pointed out that there are two purposes for revolving funds – funds set aside in the event of an emergency and also to build up healthy balances for any big projects that they are contemplating. Mr. Behn used the funds designated to be set aside for a new fire truck as an example. It was mentioned that the schools are doing the same with technology, since they need more of it. Mr. Doret mentioned that they looked at each and every program – both cost and revenue stream – and changed the way they are billing for services so people receiving the services are getting billed. Mr. Doret also pointed out that the school's collection efforts have improved. He said that every year there are new requirements from the state as to what's needed and what they'll fund and it is constantly changing. The school administration and committee realize that what they do has a significant impact on the budget and that it is a collective effort by the Superintendent, School Committee, and teachers in holding down costs.

Mr. Behn understands the schools are limited with use of revolving funds and asked about areas of Community Education and facilities usage and if there was anything specific the schools were saving for. Ms. Levine-Kanji said that Community Education money needs to be used toward the Community Education program. However, Ms. Oliver does allocate a percentage of the overhead across every school to Community Ed since that's where their programs are held. The new Director of Community Education is working on developing the programs offered and the need for new equipment, security, technology, and games. It was noted that Community Ed purchases their own equipment for the gym and do not use school equipment for their programs. Currently there is approximately \$650,000 in the Community Ed account and Ms. Oliver explained they could use a certain amount of that for an emergency. For example, if there was a broken pipe in the school, she could allocate a certain percentage to Community Ed for repairs unless it was directly their fault – and then they would pay the entire cost. Ms. Oliver said that anything that is shared she can allocate a percentage, but if it's directly for Community Ed then they can fund the whole cost. Mr. Arnold mentioned that his interpretation for Community Ed when it was started was that any profit could be used toward the schools. Ms. Oliver said she has seen old documents to that effect and pointed out that some money does come back to the schools and the Community Ed employees are paid out of that fund. Mr. Thompson said that he remembered that Community Ed was developed because the Y used to run the afterschool program and parents weren't happy. Mr. Doret said that Community Ed used to be a breakeven program 4-5 years ago but now brings in money. Ms. O'Connor said they set goals with the new management to generate income and now it's a very good program.

Mr. Behn asked about the SPED circuit breaker funds. Ms. Oliver explained that they can request the funds this year but do not get paid until next year and that they are allowed to hold on to the funds for two years, so there isn't a penalty if the funds aren't used in one year. Mr. Wells asked why there was a reduction in the circuit breaker contributions since the account costs are increasing. Ms. Oliver said that she took about 60% of the claims that the SPED Department submitted to the state for reimbursement since she's not sure what they will actually get and she was trying to be conservative. Ms. Oliver said that she has been hearing that what they will be reimbursed by the state from last year could be lower. Mr. Wells asked if there was ever a situation where after two years there were funds leftover that had to be returned to the state. Mr. Doret said they never give money back to the state and that the revolving fund is the last fund to use for Special Education after grants. Ms. Oliver said she can always prepay out of district tuition with any money that is remaining when they go to close the books. She said she likes to budget conservatively and then find ways to legally use any remaining funds before they expire.

Mr. Wells provided a spreadsheet that he created from all of the data that has filtered over from the School Department. He did a summary of budget versus actual totals going back to FY10 and an analysis of the budget change in today's dollars. His analysis and the school budget are very similar. Mr. Wells complimented the School Department and Committee and mentioned that in prior years there were big swings in the numbers but they are trending towards not having those large swings since they are using more realistic budget numbers. Mr. Doret pointed out that not only has the budget process improved but the quality of education is very good. Mr. Wells said that no one has ever questioned the dedication and quality of School Department personnel. Mr. Wells said that the numbers used to be more confusing but now have more clarity. Ms. Levine-Kanji said the clarity was due to Ms. Oliver's hard work but also pointed out that there can still be large swings in the numbers if it happens to be a year when they need to purchase textbooks or a large amount of materials for example. Ms. O'Connor said there will be some larger expenses coming up and mentioned their plans for technology such as the need for content filtering, more bandwidth, improved wiring and also wireless technology. She also mentioned the athletic field at the high school. Mr. Allen would like to echo compliments

and appreciates what they've done and pointed out that the quality of education in Westborough is what keeps home valuations up. Mr. Wells made a motion that the Committee gives a round of applause to Marianne O'Connor and wished her well with her upcoming retirement. Ms. O'Connor said it was an honor to have sat in every chair – from teacher to principal to Superintendent.

### **Continued Review and Discussion of FY15 Budget**

#### **Voting on budgets**

**School Department** – Mr. Wells moved that the Committee recommend that the Town raise and appropriate the amount of \$43,893,011 for the school budget. The vote to approve Mr. Wells' motion is 6 in favor, 1 abstention (Arnold), with 7 being present. It was mentioned that a link be provided in the Report & Recommendations Book so residents can go online and review the school's budget and detail.

**Historical Commission** – Mr. Behn wanted to re-vote the Historical Commission's Salary & Wages of \$11,677 that represents 9 hours per week for their Administrative Assistant, and was proposed and voted on at the last AFC meeting on 2/27/14. The re-vote to approve the Historical Commission Salary & Wages of \$11,677 for FY15 is 3 in favor (Wells, Rosenblum Senie, Blazejewski), 2 opposed (Allen, Rauch), and 2 abstentions (Arnold, Behn) with 7 being present.

#### **Voting on Articles**

**McKinney Vento Homeless Student Transportation Act Costs** - Mr. Wells moved to recommend the Town vote to approve this article as printed in the warrant. The vote to approve the article recommendation is 6 in favor, 1 abstaining (Arnold), with 7 being present.

Mr. Behn mentioned that all budgets and articles (with the exception of 19 & 20) have been voted by the AFC. He pointed out that on Wednesday, 3/5, there would be a meeting of the Green Technology Advisory Committee, in Room 23 of the Forbes Building, to address concerns from the community on Articles 19 & 20. Since additional information on Articles 19 & 20 may be obtained, it was decided that continued discussion on voting these two articles by the AFC can wait until their meeting on 3/6. Mr. Rauch said he would like to know the Conservation Commission's position on these articles before he votes as well.

### **Chairman, Committee Liaison, and Department Liaison Reports**

Mr. Behn referred to the Financial Revenue & Expenditure Estimates for FY2015 that he handed out to Committee members. He mentioned that the Fountainhead apartment complex recently sold for approximately \$83 million. He pointed out that taxes remain level with only an expected \$29.14 increase (.36%) on the average house tax bill, while housing values increased by 3%.

Mr. Behn has heard back from Committee members regarding the format for the AFC Report & Recommendations Book. He asked for Committee Liaison footnotes, and then he will work on the message to voters. Some topics Mr. Behn will address include funding OPEB, Snow & Ice Budget and logic, along with capital stabilization. Mr. Allen suggested addressing the contract negotiations that are still ongoing with the schools and Fire Department. Also, net metering was mentioned and having someone on hand that was knowledgeable to explain to voters. Mr. Behn said he would note that net metering would involve utility savings for some departments. Mr. Behn will send out a draft of the message to voters to Committee members for their review.

Mr. Rauch informed the Committee that he is meeting with Building Commissioner, Tin Htway, to get further clarification on the Wiring Inspector's pay scale. He will report back to the Committee after the meeting.

Mr. Wells mentioned that he has heard from the DPW's Business Administrator, Maria-Elaina Riggieri. They have approximately \$5,259 in Expenses and about \$4,000 in Salary & Wages in the Snow & Ice Budget. DPW Manager, John Walden, would like approval to purchase more rock salt and diesel fuel. Mr. Wells said that the AFC may need to vote an additional deficit spend of \$30,000 for the Snow & Ice Budget. He will confirm with Ms. Riggieri and let the Committee know at the next meeting.

**Comments and Concerns of Committee Members**

Mr. Wells asked the Committee to consider re-voting Article 9C for the Fire /Police Radio Tower since he would like to advocate using Free Cash for the entire cost of \$307,000. He pointed out that this would provide room in the budget should the schools or Fire Department need additional funds after contract negotiations are complete. Mr. Wells also asked the Committee to consider re-voting Article 16 regarding Electronic Voting. He has given the article more thought and doesn't feel \$40,000 for two Town Meetings per year is excessive. He asked the Committee to give both topics more thought and perhaps have a re-vote on these articles at Thursday's meeting, 3/6, or at Town Meeting.

Mr. Allen asked AFC member and Town Moderator candidate, John Arnold, if there is currently a reasonable process in place for secret voting on a controversial subject. Mr. Arnold said he would research and report back as to what the procedure is at the next AFC meeting.

Mr. Allen confirmed that there are no AFC meetings scheduled for the week of 3/10 and Mr. Behn said that was correct. After the AFC meeting on 3/6, the next meeting of the AFC would be 3/15 immediately preceding Town Meeting.

**Adjournment**

Mr. Wells made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 9:42 p.m. The vote to adjourn was 7 in favor, with 7 being present.

**Document List**

Westborough Public Schools FY 2015 Budget – PowerPoint Presentation – School Department  
Statistical Analysis – Westborough School Department FY10-FY15 Budgets – Gary Wells  
Financial Revenue & Expenditure Estimates for FY2015

Respectfully submitted,  
Jessica Thomas  
AFC Administrative Assistant