

Members Present: Gary Wells, Chair, Lisa Blazejewski, Ed Behn, Peter Allen, Tara Howard, Beth Blumberg, Hank Rauch. Absent: Jim Tepper, Sharon Kaiser.

At 7:00 p.m. Mr. Wells called the meeting to order in Room 23 of the Forbes Municipal Building.

Open Forum

There were no requests to address the Committee. Mr. Wells announced that there will be an extended Open Forum period on Thursday, February 19th, for residents to voice their opinion on the Town budget.

Approval of Past Minutes:

Meeting No. 11, January 5, 2015

Mr. Behn and Mr. Allen requested corrections to the minutes. Mr. Behn made a motion to approve the amended minutes from 1-5-15. Voted: 7-0-0.

School Department/School Committee

Amber Bock, School Superintendent, Irene Oliver, Director of Finance and Administration, Steve Doret, School Committee Chair, and Ilyse Levine-Kanji, School Committee Vice-Chair, met with the AFC to discuss their FY16 budget. Ms. Bock thanked Mr. Behn and Ms. Howard for attending their pre-meetings. She quickly went through the video presentation that she will most likely present at the Annual Town Meeting (ATM) in March. Ms. Bock mentioned the timeline involved in putting together the budget. They began with budget guidelines, and then moved to the budget recommendation with a 2.56% increase, and then finally the budget development process. She mentioned that they partnered with the Town to determine the expected student enrollment for preschool, kindergarten, and grades 1 through 12, as well as reviewing the change from prior years. Regarding the percentage of students who are special needs, Ms. Bock mentioned that Westborough falls right within the state average and that the trend has been stable or downward over the past few years. Ms. Bock also pointed out that the number of English Learning Language (ELL) and low income students has been on par with the rest of the state. Ms. Bock said that there were some budget adjustments that allowed for added requested positions. There were also some unfunded FY16 requests that remain on the table to be looked at later or possibly not at all. The decisions that did come forward – which are included in the 2.56% increase – include other staffing. There were some small additions to stabilize staffing and allow for growth at the elementary level. The FY16 School Department Budget summary was referred to and it was mentioned that this is what will be put forward at Town Meeting. Mr. Behn said that he has reviewed the budget numbers for 2013, 2014, 2015, and 2016, and they have remained somewhat flat with no net increase in regular operating expenses – even with salary increases. He pointed out that the 2.56% increase is basically providing for additional staffing needs, and also mentioned that there was a significant drop in out of district tuitions. Ms. Bock said that the reduction in out of district tuitions was a result of an aggressive use of circuit breaker funds, along with an aggressive approach to bringing students back to in-house programs. Ms. Levine-Kanji wanted to add that the additional staffing was necessary due to increased enrollment. Ms. Blumberg felt that the presentation was all about special education programming and asked what was being done for the average student. Mr. Doret mentioned that this was the first year that they've received some relief from the special education program so they could look at programming for the general population of the school. Mr. Rauch pointed out that the percentage increase in students – which breaks down to 45 additional students – accounts for about 1-1.5% of the 2.56% increase with the other 1% as the rest. Mr. Doret spoke about the density of housing being built and that they are pleased to be collaborating with the Planning Board. Ms. Bock added that they lose students as well and they need to look at all the numbers. She mentioned that they get some stabilization in high school from having a certain amount of programming in place.

Ms. Howard asked about staffing, referring specifically to the crossing guards since that line item was reduced. Ms. Bock said it is difficult to hire for that position since the hours are odd. They have one opening that hasn't filled and another guard that will be retiring. Instead they are looking at installing flashing lights, along with additional alerts, at crosswalks. Ms. Bock mentioned that the Police Department and DPW have been helpful with this decision. Additional staffing changes include hiring a new middle school nurse who will come in at a lower rate since the current nurse is retiring. Ms. Oliver said that the Community Relations position that was recently created is for her assistant. Ms. Howard brought up the increase for the school psychologist position and Ms. Oliver clarified that is to help with the new testing materials.

Mr. Behn wanted to discuss the more aggressive use of revolving funds and grant money. He mentioned that the Selectmen have set goals to have reserves for anticipated debt, and asked what should be kept in reserves as a reasonable amount for special education funding. He pointed out that circuit breaker funds are received a year later for the cost of special education for the previous year. We are currently receiving about 75% of the cost back from the state, but at one point we only received 42%. Mr. Behn asked if it was reasonable to keep a whole year's worth of circuit breaker funds in reserves. Ms. Oliver mentioned that she feels more confident on what they'll receive back, since over the past three years it has been at the 70%+ reimbursement rate. Mr. Behn felt it would be helpful to have a percentage for reserves – for example 100%, or 80% - so there would be an idea of the amount needed. Mr. Behn suggested having an average cost per student, and then they could go to the Town for any unanticipated costs. Mr. Doret said that they are trying to manage expenses within their budget, but Mr. Behn raises a good point and they will consider it. Ms. Levine-Kanji pointed out that right now they have a good balance.

Regarding technology, Ms. Howard said there was a huge increase to this line item and the schools need to let residents know why that's so high. Mr. Doret mentioned that the state is requiring some sort of electronic device per student for testing purposes. There are also additional costs for connections within the schools, so the cost of the whole program increases. Mr. Doret thought it would be helpful to include answers to questions asked of them by the Finance Committee and the Selectmen in the handout provided at Town Meeting. Ms. Blazejewski asked how the technology grant that was received matches up to what's needed. Ms. Bock said they are in the process of re-aligning the grant to match what's within the budget. They are currently developing future strategic plans, so that money will most likely be spent in FY2017. Mr. Doret pointed to state mandates and that we have been accomplishing what's been required, which is why he thinks we received more grant money than we requested. Mr. Wells mentioned that he is very much in support of changes in technology. He said he felt that Jon Green, the Director of Technology for the schools, was on the right track and that the \$180,000 increase in technology is money well spent. Mr. Wells said he also supports the increase in teachers and support personnel, which adds about \$800,000 to the salary budget. He mentioned that there are likely other expenses associated with adding employees, but that it is needed, especially with the change in demographics. However Mr. Wells said he has been scrutinizing the numbers and he is worried about the accumulated growth in some of the revolving funds such as facility usage, athletics, the Community Education program, and activity fees. He felt these funds should be used as "pass through" accounts and what is collected should be spent. Otherwise those excess funds should be turned back in toward the budget to offset expenses. Mr. Wells pointed to tuitions for preschool, kindergarten and summer school and if \$700,000 is collected in tuitions – that amount should go directly toward those accounts. He mentioned that those funds have grown significantly. Mr. Wells said that he understands some of that money should be saved toward reserves but he looks at the numbers and sees about half a million dollars that could be turned back in toward the school budget. Mr. Wells pointed to money set aside for lane increases for higher education, which is budgeted at \$370,000+, yet only \$14,000 has been used since 2010. He asked how these budgetary numbers were arrived at and whether \$370,000 was needed. Mr. Wells also pointed out transportation costs and thought that was budgeted \$400,000 over what was necessary. He is looking at \$500,000 to a million dollars that is over budgeted, and if we could trim that amount, we could reallocate some of those funds toward any type of tax increase that may result from the Gibbons renovations and that would keep taxes flat. Otherwise Mr. Wells says he supports the budget but believes there are areas where monetary values can be adjusted while still accomplishing what needs to be accomplished.

Mr. Behn, as the school liaison, addressed some of Mr. Wells' concerns. Regarding the revolving funds – for example activity fees – he pointed to the handout provided for the School Department Budgeting Primer on Grants and Revolving Funds and mentioned that you can't use activity fees to offset anything else in the budget. Mr. Wells asked why it couldn't go to a maintenance account, and Ms. Oliver pointed out that the turf field project that they are saving up for in that account will come in at over a million dollars. Mr. Behn mentioned that the funds in that account are being saved toward accomplishing this project and that activity fees need to support activities that students are paying for and can't be used for anything else. Ms. Bock said that she is working with Ms. Oliver and the School Committee on using these funds more aggressively, however, these funds need to be used toward what they are collected for. Ms. Oliver spoke about lanes and longevity increases and offered to share a worksheet she has that could provide more detail. Mr. Behn added that the money that is set aside for this account is for teachers, para-professionals, secretaries, and other school personnel that may be finishing a degree which would result in a shift in salary. It also takes in to account any increases to salaries for years of service and those taking advantage of early retirement. Ms. Oliver said that \$126,000 is what they think they'll spend on average for these costs. Ms. Bock pointed out that Ms. Oliver is now in her fourth year of employment within the schools and has been working toward satisfying costs for these departments. Ms. Bock pointed to the Community Education program and mentioned that they need a new van, and they also have some space issues that need to be addressed. Ms. Oliver has been accumulating funds toward these anticipated expenses since they'd rather not go to the Town to ask for money to purchase a new van. Ms. Bock said that they would rather work forward toward these expenses and provide their contribution for what's needed. Mr. Doret understands that there wasn't documentation as to how and where money was spent previously but now they have documentation in place for transfers. They want to make sure there's transparency when money is moved around to other line items. Regarding Mr. Wells' concern over the transportation account, Ms. Oliver said that they are in their fifth and final year of their current contract. In surveying bus prices in this area and spreading out further, the cost was averaging a little more, and consultants were indicating a jump in costs since we are the lowest in this area. Ms. Oliver said they were successful in getting the current contractor to honor 2013 rates, which came in after the budget was set and helped mitigate a spike in costs. Ms. Bock mentioned that they may need to purchase some new buses, and Mr. Doret said these costs may come in at more than what was anticipated. Ms. Oliver pointed out that the cost per day/per bus is \$240. Ms. Oliver felt that at this point the money in these funds is at a point where they don't need to worry, so she thought they could have this discussion. Mr. Doret said they would take a look at the money set aside in these reserve funds and respond back to the Committee in writing. He didn't feel that the accounts Mr. Wells listed off have money that can be used, but they may find something that can be looked at further. Mr. Wells added that on February 23rd they'll be back for the Gibbons renovation discussion.

Warrant articles 12J for a new hot water heater at the high school and 12K to upgrade building controls for HVAC to a direct digital control system were discussed. Article 12J is looking for \$145,000 to replace the hot water heater at the high school that is located above the gyms and is leaking. It was noted that the hot water heater provides hot water to the kitchen and locker rooms. Ms. Bock commented on the process they went through with the Capital Review Planning Committee and that they have their support. Ms. Blazejewski mentioned that, as liaison to the Capital Planning Review Committee, everything listed in Article 12 received the highest recommendation. She pointed out that 1% of the budget is allocated for capital expenses. Ms. Howard asked if energy costs will be reduced since the heater that will be installed is newer and more efficient, and Mr. Doret mentioned that there should be savings. Ms. Blazejewski suggested adding that to their presentation at Town Meeting since the payback number is important. Mr. Behn asked about the well they wanted to install at Mill Pond and Mr. Doret said they are actually moving forward with that project and will pay for it out of their own budget.

ATM preparation and related items:

The Board of Health is asking for a transfer request in the amount of \$3,000. Mr. Wells spoke with Board of Health Director, Steve Baccari, and questioned him on the numbers. Mr. Baccari explained to Mr. Wells that since September they've spent about \$3,500 for case management services for three Town residents with

Tuberculosis. Mr. Wells asked Mr. Baccari if \$3,000 would be sufficient until the end of this fiscal year and he thought it would be. Of the three patients being monitored, one is expected to come off the list soon, another is able to have their monitoring services reduced, and the third has other medical issues, so is in and out of the hospital, therefore the Town doesn't provide regular monitoring. Mr. Wells said that Mr. Baccari spoke with the visiting nurse and they thought that \$3,000 is an adequate amount to request for the balance of the year. Mr. Behn made a motion to authorize the transfer from the AFC Reserve Fund to the Board of Health Account #5245 for Other Professional Services in the amount of \$3,000 for the purpose of taking care of residents diagnosed with Tuberculosis. Voted: 7-0-0.

Chairman, Committee Liaison, and Department Liaison Reports

Mr. Wells handed out the FY16 Departmental Meeting Schedule for February and March in a calendar month format. He again mentioned that on February 19th there will be an extended Open Forum for residents and it was pointed out that is school vacation week. Mr. Wells asked the Committee if they should move the date and the Committee agreed. There was discussion about alternative dates and the Committee decided to offer two different time slots. The dates determined were February 12th and February 19th for the extended Open Forum after the AFC has concluded the items on their agenda. Mr. Wells mentioned that he has received numerous emails from residents concerned with the size of the school budget, along with the growing Town budget. Mr. Wells said he will reply back to these residents with the dates for the extended Open Forum. Mr. Behn asked him to point out the budget information that is available online. Ms. Howard asked if they'd have a time limit and Mr. Wells felt that 5 minutes should be sufficient for an individual to come before the Committee and discuss their concerns. If a valid point is made, the Committee can extend the time allotted to have a question and answer session.

Upon continued review of the FY16 Departmental Meeting Schedule, the Committee decided to invite the Council on Aging and Country Club in to discuss their articles in the warrant. It was determined that Mr. Malloy may be able to report on MIS/GIS. Mr. Behn will provide a report to the Committee on Assabet Valley Regional Technical School. Mr. Behn felt that more time should be spent discussing capital expenditures for the Westborough Public schools. He mentioned that BRA – an engineering consultant company – came in and went through the schools and prioritized items that need to be done, and it is a fairly extensive list. Mr. Behn was also concerned with Astra Pharmaceuticals moving out of Westborough and the Gibbons School renovations. He pointed out that discussions regarding these upcoming issues need to take place so residents can be alerted as to what is coming up. Mr. Wells mentioned that he would contact Jack Goodhall with the Wastewater Treatment Plant to see if he could come in on February 5th with the DPW. There was agreement among the Committee that perhaps the Economic Development Committee (EDC) should be invited in, but Mr. Allen felt that Mr. Malloy may be able to answer questions pertaining to the EDC, and more specifically the effect Astra's relocation may have on residents.

Mr. Rauch received an email from the DPW mentioning some concerns over the costs associated with the recent blizzard. The DPW wanted to let Mr. Rauch know that they may need additional funds for snow and ice removal. Mr. Rauch said that he'll have a better idea when he receives an update from them next Thursday. Mr. Wells mentioned that both he and Mr. Rauch receive weekly reports from DPW Business Administrator, Maria-Elaina Riggieri, with costs associated with sanding and storms based on inches.

Mr. Allen reported on the Municipal Building Committee. On January 5th, Mr. Allen had informed the Committee about a transformer issue with the Town Hall that was in limbo and causing delays to the renovations. On January 12th, Town Manager, Jim Malloy, was successful in getting three key decision makers together from National Grid and work on installing the new transformer has finally begun. The July move in date is more definite now since the General Contractor, R.A.C., will now have power and their work can continue.

Ms. Blazejewski provided an update on the Charter Review Committee. They are on a hiatus for February. Robert Deysher, Chair of the Charter Review Committee, presented an interim report at the Board of Selectmen meeting last Tuesday. Ms. Blazejewski said that the Selectmen voted unanimously to expand the responsibility given the

Committee so they can change some of the language in the Charter. Ms. Blazejewski mentioned that they have come across many instances where the language in the Charter conflicted with Mass General Law. They are now getting some legal help from the Town's interim attorney at Mirick O'Connell, who is reviewing the language while they are off this month.

Comments and Concerns – Committee Members

None

Public Reminders for Viewers

None

Adjournment

Mr. Behn made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 9:48p.m. The vote to adjourn was 7-0-0 in favor, with 7 being present.

Document List

Westborough FY16 School Department Budget Report
School Department Grants and Revolving Funds
School Department Budgeting Primer on Grants and Revolving Funds
2015 Annual Town Meeting Warrant
Board of Health Request for Transfer from Reserve Fund
FY16 Departmental Meeting Schedule – Gary Wells

Respectfully submitted,
Jessica Thomas
AFC Administrative Assistant