



Winthrop School Committee
Winthrop, Massachusetts

A special joint meeting of the Winthrop Town Council and the Winthrop School Committee was held on Wednesday, May 18, 2011 in the Multipurpose Room of the Arthur T. Cummings School. The meeting was called to order by the Town Council President at 6:05pm.

ROLL CALL

Present: Mr. Sacco, Mr. Perrin, Mr. Rotondo, Mr. Holden, Ms. Osborne, Mr. Turco, Mr. Letterie, Mr. Boncore, Mr. Sanford, Mr. DelVento, Ms. Maggio, Mr. Varone

Mr. Powers and Ms. Polino were absent
Ms. Calla arrived at 6:15pm.

Also meeting with Committee:

Dr. Joseph F. Lisi, Interim Superintendent of Schools
James McKenna, Town Manager
Susan Eccles, Office Manager
Karin Chavis, Citizen's Advisory Committee on Finance
Marc Wallerice, Citizen's Advisory Committee on Finance
Barbara Flavin, Citizen's Advisory Committee on Finance
Robert Wynn, Citizen's Advisory Committee on Finance
Jan Twombly, Citizen's Advisory Committee on Finance
John Macero, Superintendent elect

Councilor Jim Letterie led the committees in the Pledge of Allegiance

Mr. Turco suggested that questions provided by Mr. Rotondo could be answered by Town Manager Mr. McKenna and then start with the finance piece, move to buildings & grounds, and wrap it up with IT. After this meeting we could make a determination whether we need to schedule another meeting. It was determined that a Motion cannot be made at this meeting because there are three independent groups. Tonight is for discussion. It was suggested by Councilor DelVento to put a three hour maximum on the meeting.

Mr. McKenna addressed the committee members regarding his consolidation proposal.

Discussion took place regarding Mr. McKenna's consolidation proposal. Several issues were raised about the finance piece including the proposed position of the Assistant CFO and the role as a liaison for the School Department, the position of the School Department's Office Manager, possibly adding one or two additional staff people in the Business Office of the School Department. Mr. McKenna stated the role of the Assistant CFO would be crucial – relying heavily on the understanding of software we use, coordinating the use of software, testing, being an extra set of eyes if the CFO is not here, answer questions, troubleshoot.

Mr. Rotondo pointed out that this was all on the municipal side, and not on the school side. Mr. McKenna provided a list of the functions that the Assistant CFO already does for the school department: worker's compensation, health insurance, accident claims, partial payroll systems,

postings, non-teacher and non-certified teacher retirement, procurement for utilities. Mr. Rotondo questioned staffing issues.

Dr. Lisi spoke regarding consolidation and he stated that the right people in the right positions will do a good job. The School Department's identity is not going away – it's the largest department, the most expensive, it's the most visible department. We are involved with kids every day. Dr. Lisi stated that professionally he would never want to be in a position to be held accountable for outcomes and not be in a position to directly involve the decisions that would lead to those outcomes. This does not mean the Superintendent of Schools should be the one to say everything and do everything – you pick people to do that. Eventually your organization has to reflect your philosophy, how you deal with things because you are going to be accountable for those things. The Superintendent of Schools is always fully accountable for everything that goes on within a school system from the custodian cleaning, to a science teacher making a mistake in a classroom. All of these things rest on the shoulders of the Superintendent. You need to be in a position to influence those decisions. As far as the financial piece is concerned, we are already organized in a way that gets things done. The Town Manager sets the budget, provides the appropriation for the School Department, the CFO oversees that whole process and interacts with us. Dr. Lisi stated that he feels putting a person between the CFO and the Office Manager for the School Department creates some ambiguity, like a communication link. This is the thing that bothers me. Dr. Lisi feels the line of communication needs to be adjusted. Dr. Lisi referred to his flow charts. The School Superintendent or his designee interacts with all of these key people – the CFO, MIS Director, Grounds person and the Facilities Director. All of these positions are key positions that eventually will reflect the caliber of work that is done in the School Department and he wouldn't want to lose the ability to directly communicate with them.

Mr. McKenna stated that the Assistant CFO is the person for the schools and is your person. There is direct support. Dr. Lisi stated that he would want to interview and hire that person if he was Superintendent of Schools.

Ms. Twombly stated there are two different issues. There is the dedication of the CFO equally to the Town and the School Department. The other issue that is not clear from this plan is the job description. This is clearly described as the Accountant job and we do not have a job description for the School Business Manager in this book. We need to ensure that we have an Accountant with specialized unique knowledge at the school levels. While it is entirely possible that it is intended in this plan, it is not clear. As a former auditor coming in and taking look at this I would be extremely concerned if I did not have someone responsible for this portion of the Town that requires that specialized knowledge. Ms. Twombly stated she has not seen a job description for this position.

Mr. Macero stated that he has good discussion with Dr. Lisi and he has had discussion with Mr. McKenna before the plan was presented. Mr. Macero stated he believes in the concept of the consolidation. We should use as many services that we can have for the School Department, as well as the Town. With that said when you dissect it all, my one area of concern is the actual person who is going to be accountable when it comes to school finance. That's the one person that I need to be able to communicate with on a daily basis, as Jan said, to be able to project numbers, where we are at, how we are doing with the budget. Someone with school based experience right away. I would like to interview that person because they need to have that expertise for what we share.

Mr. Boncore stated as he sees it, the person who is in there now would more than likely be the one, or the right person to become the Assistant Finance Director and will be working at that position.

Mr. Perrin stated he feels that the knowledge and experience of the job description to reflect the business office experience. I cannot imagine how much we would lose if we are not properly reporting. The Assistant CFO has to have that knowledge – this is such a specialized area.

Ms. Osborne stated that back in March there was a Town Council Finance Committee meeting where consolidation issues were first discussed and I expressed my concerns at that time, about the knowledge of school reporting, from a business perspective. How will these people, in these positions on the Town side, interacting more and more on the School side, without that knowledge. How will this happen? I was told that there is a preliminary plan to outsource some of that reporting. I do not think that is the way to start – outsource until the finance people can come up to speed with the school piece.

Mr. DelVento stated that this job is going to have to be established. You really need a school professional who understands the DESE. You need someone who knows the intricacies of how school finance and budget works. I do not know if that is clearly in the Assistant CFO job. On the Barnstable model, which I have not seen, is there an Assistant Superintendent of Schools? Who does the Superintendent have working for him? Our school staff is really lean. We need to look at what that other model really is and what those job descriptions are.

Mr. Turco stated that with consolidation, if both the Superintendent and the Town Manager have a deadline and they need something, they are two professional people. Presumably John and Jim will walk across the hall and work it out. If these things come up and they cannot be resolved, then presumably the Superintendent and the Town Manager would say this consolidation is not working – cancel it.

Mr. McKenna suggested working with the people we have in place and design these job descriptions in and around what we have, because that is all we have. If you are saying that this is not what you want to do, then that is a different approach.

Discussion took place regarding calling in consultants and professionals. Efficiency may not happen in the first year.

Mr. Macero stated that he will go forward and work very hard to make this happen if this what the Committees decide to do. I think the best thing is to define what the roles are. I really want this to work. I do not want to go back to the School Committee and say it doesn't work. Whatever we can do to define things better, a little more detailed from the school perspective.

Mr. Bertino commented on the outsourcing piece. If this starts July 1st, the statistical reporting that is required is for 365 days back. It would be really unfair for someone to come in and have to go back and go over everything over the last 365 days to prepare a statistical report. The second part of that is that Dr. Lisi mentioned he wasn't happy with the timing of this reporting, so by outsourcing in the first year and you take that "monkey off your back". I actually closed the book twice in my first 90 days here because nothing was done. If you want to succeed I think you have to get off on the right foot, you can't go backwards. That is why outsourcing was suggested - to make the timelines necessary.

Ms. Twombly stated that as we look to articulate better job descriptions, we probably want to get crisper on articulating milestones and goals. If this in fact is a work in process where there are certain things that are brought together and consolidated immediately and some things that are going to take longer, perhaps if we have that articulation of what we're trying to achieve and what will not be achieved, that might make the process a little bit stronger as we move through this.

Lengthy discussion took place regarding the financial aspect of the consolidation. Some of the questions asked were should the School Finance Director position stay in the budget? Who will be responsible for Human Resources? Do we have a project plan with timelines, dates, goals, etc. How will we break down the consolidation cost? What is the estimate of the cost?

Mr. Holden asked if the organization charts could show names, if the people are in place anyway. Discussion took place regarding the Assistant CFO position.

Ms. Maggio stated that she feels someone with a financial background for schools is very important. There are many requirements that are very separate from municipal budgeting and reporting. It is absolutely essential that you have someone in place that has that background and knowledge. We should be transparent to the public and we should have postings.

Mr. McKenna stated that there is a presumption in the personnel guidelines that the town has that provides for internal postings. It is a value to give potential to those who are employed and it encourages promotion.

Discussion took place on the cost of the consolidation and the hiring of an auditor.

Ms. Chavis expressed concern over the job description of the CFO and the fact that there are no job descriptions for the school side.

Discussion took place on Buildings and Grounds. There are equipment and manpower issues to be worked out. Discussion took place regarding the Facilities Manager position. Questions raised included snow removal, custodians on site, outsourcing the cleaning, etc. Discussion took place regarding the Middle School and the boiler issue, the rink, operation and maintenance of the rink. Mr. McKenna stated the Facilities Manager position is a "hands on position". The proposed plan has the rink under the direction of the Facilities Manager, not the Parks & Recreation Department. The Fire Department buildings are not in the plan because their buildings are well maintained and maintained by primarily volunteers.

Dr. Lisi mentioned that the sale of the Dalrymple School for capital improvements is a great opportunity to get the facilities to where they should be.

Discussion took place regarding the MIS operations.

Mr. Turco stated that at any time, with the majority of votes, this whole process can be stopped.

At 9:10pm Mr. Perrin made a Motion to adjourn. Mr. Sanford seconded the Motion. Mr. Sacco-yes, Mr. Perrin-yes, Mr. Holden-yes, Ms. Osborne-yes, Mr. Turco-yes, Mr. Letterie-yes, Mr. Boncore-yes, Ms. Calla-yes, Mr. Sanford-yes, Mr. DelVento-yes, Ms. Maggio-yes, Mr. Varone-yes. A unanimous vote.