

Special Board of Selectmen's Meeting
February 26, 2013

Present: First Selectman Gayle Weinstein; Selectman David Muller; Selectman Dennis Tracey III; Town Administrator Tom Landry; Administrative Assistant Judy DeVito; Superintendent Colleen Palmer; Finance Director Joann Keating; Assistant Superintendent Ken Craw; Phil Schaefer, Chairman Board of Education, Members of the Board of Education, Administrator; residents and members of the press.

This meeting was recorded and videotaped. The tapes are available in the Selectmen's office.

Ms. Weinstein called the meeting to order at 7:30pm

Pledge of Allegiance-

Board of Education presented their FY 2013-2014 budget for review to the Board of Selectmen:

Phil Schaefer, Chairman of the Board of Education, said that they have kept the budget increases as low as possible. They are proposing a 1.55% increase to their operating budget for FY 2013-2014. This budget increase includes the need to address issues of enhancing security since the Sandy Hook tragedy and the proposal for a new hire in the Special Education area. The rate of growth of the increases of the Board of Education Operating budget each year has slowed remarkably when compares to other Towns around them. The Administration has done an excellent job controlling the operating costs and the Board of Education is very comfortable with this budget.

Dr. Palmer said if you took the current staff that we have this year and move that staff forward, the impact on salary and benefits from contractual increases would be approximately 1 million dollars. Without doing anything, our benchmark to start with was a million dollars which is more than a 2% increase. If you look at the ways they have addressed the mandates from the State, the needs of the school district, accounting for the increase in security, all of that is incorporated in the 1.55% which is about \$700,000. They have taken the base line and cut that back through efficiencies and through smart decisions. They bring forward a budget that meets the educational needs of their district and is also cost effective.

Mr. Tracey asked if there was a long term plan to reduce per pupil spending. Dr. Palmer said with the labor cost and contractual obligations, and costs that are beyond the control of the district, that it is not feasible to assume that you're going to have a zero percent budget year after year. The district has been aggressive in keeping the rate of increase much lower than other comparable districts in order to chip away at that differential of per pupil cost. Weston is a small school that pays for a central office staff that runs the district at a set cost which is over a million dollars. To save money, Weston would have to dissolve its own school district and go in with another district. Another way to save off of the base is to say we are not going to do business exactly the same way.

Assuming that you want to maintain your school district, the goal is to keep our increases as low as possible. When she talks about the million dollar increase, if you project out

Special Board of Selectmen's Meeting
February 26, 2013

over the next few years, you're looking at a million dollars year after year on the base for salary and benefits. That is very difficult to address. We have decreasing enrollments, so how do we address that? They have trimmed away staff appropriately. In one FY from 2011-12 to 2012-13 they have reduced seven classroom teachers K-5. They have some classes that are really tight and they need to add some teachers so it's not that they are adding staff during decreasing enrollment, but they were very aggressive last year and now they have some classes bumping against the guidelines. They are still bringing the number of teachers down.

Mr. Muller said taking the comparison of our district increase to other district increases which is used as an argument, if we accept that that is a fair metric to use, we have to accept the metric of per pupil cost. Per pupil cost has gone up almost \$2,000 dollars in the last three years. We have a declining enrollment. By continuing to add to the base, you can never pierce that increase in per pupil cost. We will price ourselves right out of the market. A million dollars a year is not acceptable.

Ms. Weinstein said we have to give the schools the same chance to do a zero base analysis and build the budget from the ground up to determine the wants and the needs. So while she thinks the number is important, and the percent increase is important, she also thinks that we have to look at what is actually being included, and decide whether if that is what we need to provide the quality education that we have.

Ms. Weinstein asked if they were anticipating returning any funds back to the Town. Jo-Ann Keating, Director of Operations, said she does reforecast at the end of December and was a balance of \$93,111. She put that in the budget to be transferred to the internal services fund. It came from saving within the budget.

They are looking for a new administrator in Special Education and Lois Pernice said that even though the numbers in Special Education have not increased, the student needs have. They have a lot of contact services that they are still utilizing, and the complexity of cases is increasing. The legal requests have increased as well as the mediations from those legal requests.

Mr. Tracey asked what the new administrator would do versus Lois. She said they were still fleshing out the specifics but they are looking at a way to divide the amount of time. They are not sure whether it will be task or school specific. There is not a finalized job description yet. They are working on it now, so at this point and time, they are not tying themselves into a particular job description. Ms. Weinstein asked why full-time and not school year. Lois said that her job is full time and there is summer school program which they have increased in the summer. A lot of mediations also happen in the summer.

Ms. Weinstein said that another problem she has, is that they are eliminating a SPED teacher at the High School to make up for this and she has a great concern about that. The SPED numbers they have stayed consistent and she would hate to give up that direct instruction to get another administrator. Lois said that two years ago they added a teacher to the High School to create a life skills program. They also have a transition person so

Special Board of Selectmen's Meeting
February 26, 2013

that has reduced some of the load on the High School teachers. They have also transitioned some kids into the main stream so they don't have as many pull out classes. They have been able to remove some of the 504 kids out of the Special Education strategies class.

Mr. Muller asked if we have made any progress on revenue creation through services in district for the current out of district students. They did initially start looking at some of the needs in the area but they couldn't find a particular area. They are beginning to develop a 19 to 21 year old program.

Ms. Weinstein asked about the \$30,000 in the budget to fund services in the area of drug and alcohol consulting. Lois said they put this in because they are seeing an increase in terms of the number of students that have substance abuse issues. They are not looking for an FTE, but they are looking for consulting services. Ms. Weinstein said that the Board has decided to bring the new Youth Services Director, Michelle Albright back one of the days that they reduced last year so she will be working four days a week to help work with the families. She thinks it's important to hook up the family with the connection, but she doesn't think it is our responsibility to pay for those services that go with it. Ms. Weinstein asked that they have a conversation with Michelle Albright to see if they could negate the need for the \$30,000.

The Selectmen reviewed the budget by section.

Ms. Weinstein said she looks at the technology budget and it is ballooning. She did not see a need for five flat screen TV's for the Middle School Library. There are a lot of unused flat screens in WIS and she can't see spending \$10,000 more. She said we need to take a closer look at the software we are buying for administration because that's where she sees an ability to reduce the budget.

The Selectmen thanked the Board of Education and the meeting adjourned at 10:35pm

Respectfully submitted

Judy M. DeVito
Administrative Assistant
Approved 4/4/13