

Special Board of Selectmen's Meeting

February 3, 2010

Present: First Selectman Gayle Weinstein; Selectman David Muller; Selectman Daniel Gilbert; Town Administrator Tom Landry; Superintendent Jerry Belair; Chairman Board of Education Philip Schaefer; Finance Director Jo-Ann Keating; Members of the Board of Education; Administrative Assistant Judy DeVito, Press and members of the public.

This meeting was recorded and video taped and the tapes are available in the Selectmen's office.

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

Board of Selectmen review Board of Education Budget- Phil Schaefer said that the Board of Education met for three budget workshops during the week of January 11th for approximately seven hours.

Mr. Schaefer said over the last year they have the highest CAPT scores for grade 10 students in the State of Connecticut. They are the only Connecticut High School to have 80% of its students to score gold or above on all four of the CAPT test. WHS has been recognized as the most outstanding exemplary athletic program in the State of Connecticut from the CIAC. US news and World Report magazine recognized Weston High School as one of the top high schools in the US. The graduates of the Weston public schools attend the most highly competitive colleges and universities.

In the last three years they have really achieved tremendous amount of cost savings in terms of trying to run the most efficient and effective school system that we can. They basically are continuing the path of excellence but they are really trying to rethink how they deliver those services. In the last three years they have generated more than 3.9 million dollars in cost reductions through a combination of saving generated by bidding and restructuring and proved efficiencies and containments. He said that is one of the reasons that they are delivering a budget of 1.64%.

Mr. Schaefer said the budget sustains the integrity of the programs, the character of the schools allows them to continuously improve. This budget continues our tradition of excellence as reflected in music, art, athletic programs and most of all it is needs- based.

Mr. Belair, Superintendent of Schools said the budget represents a 1.64 % increase over FY 2010 budget. It is not a rollover budget. The overriding goal in the development of the budget has been to be thoughtful about their decision making. The budget is needs based, built from the ground up, is data driven. They have looked at their enrollment trend data, their fixed costs and a number of mandated services. The budget is sensitive to the economic conditions.

Mr. Belair highlighted the process so the Selectmen understood the working that went into the development of the budget. They looked at their enrollment data, and then they go to building the staffing to support the number of students. They need to look at services needed by the special education students. The biggest curve ball relates to the special education expenditures. They are anticipating an additional out of district placement for a cost of \$77,000 additional dollars.

They are looking at a reduction in the excess cost grant. This budget represents a 60% reimbursement that is \$167,000 that they needed to absorb right at the beginning. When those two factors are added they had an increase of .6%. They have reconstructed and reassigned secretaries and custodial staff to meet the needs. They have reduced the Middle School sports coordinator and absorbed that with some support from the athletic director as well as restructuring that program.

They are offering three new courses at the High School and not adding staff. They are suspending their effort with virtual High School. Right now it is not fully cost effective and later on they will come back to that. They have a pool of 7 people who have taken on the responsibility of running channel 78.

They have bought vehicles to transport the special education students to save money. The drivers are internal staff. This budget proposes a special assignment for one year in the area of special education. They need to be thinking about how they can provide those services in district versus out of district. They have consolidated the autism services within their district.

They have reduced the contracted cleaning services by re-bidding and adding a performance clause to that contract. They have upgraded all of their energy management software and there are some significant savings. The bottom line is they are trying to reorganize to improve productivity.

They have allocated funds for instructional reasons. They have allocated fund for basic maintenance and ground care. They also allocated funds for contracted services. An important need is around some equipment in the technology budget, 72% of their equipment will be six or more years of age as they enter into the new school year. They need to put together a four year technology plan.

Mr. Belair said the resources in this budget will enable the students and staff to engage in learning experiences which are really quite central to their purpose. They have examined and reviewed all of their practices.

Ms. Weinstein asked about the Internal Service Fund and what they anticipated taking out of that. Dr. Keating said that they are currently in the process of having their renewal for next year renegotiated with Cigna. They will not have that figure until probably the third week of February. Once that information is available they will be able to do a projection for the current year and then a projection for next year. They are concerned as well because they funding a portion of their budget through the Internal Services Fund.

The trend right now is 13% to 14% on health insurance increase. For every percent over 5%, each percent is \$70,000. They need to take a look at where they come in with renewal and how that is going to impact the fund. The tail right now YTD is less than \$500,000. The majority of the impact is of the tail coming off. They currently stand at 1.8 million.

Mr. Muller asked that they explain what the fund was for. Ms. Keating said one of the purposes of the fund is to smooth out volatility. When they were self funded, they were very susceptible to high volatility in the actual claims. Now that they are fully insured they know what their premiums are going to be and their expenses in terms of the current year. If they see a huge increase in the premium aspect of their health plan will need to be scrutinized again. She said that fund has been used for the purpose of smoothing out volatility this fiscal year and possibly the next few years.

The other purpose of the fund was for catastrophic claims. The second year that the fund was in effect, they actually built up a balance of close to a 1 million based on claims coming below what was projected.

Mr. Gilbert said if they did not accomplish their goal to transition 50 people to the Health Savings Account they would be dipping into the Internal Service Account. From his prospective, this was not why the fund was created. Dr. Keating said one of the reasons for establishing the fund was risk management. The other was volatility in terms of year after year is health insurance cost. Mr. Gilbert said that he thought it would be important to quantify each of those dimensions where the fund is being used and get a sense for what the balance is going to look like in the long term.

Mr. Muller asked about the student enrollment numbers and how much of a handicap in terms of accuracy and changes that you see during the year. Mr. Belair said if you look at the charts, the projections are very close with the exception of a couple of years ago where they had 63 additional students that they needed to absorb. Generally speaking, the projections are very close. The kindergarten is the wild card and three years ago they implemented a process to monitor it on a monthly base and they are doing that.

Mr. Gilbert asked about the HSA plan. Mr. Belair said they began the roll out yesterday. They have a support base of approximately 30 staff members that have lived it and experience it and can help them talk with other staff members around that. Dr. Keating explained the way the HSA works and said they were looking at ways to offer incentives to encourage people into the plan.

Mr. Muller asked, in crafting the budget how they approached user fees. Mr. Belair said they took the comments from last year very seriously. They provide the board a lot of comparative data from community to community and they had a thorough discussion during the workshop process. They felt that because of all of the contributions that parents make for so many things, that this would not be the time.

Ms. Weinstein asked why there was an additional \$9,400 for a new assistant principal when there used to be an assistant principal there. Mr. Belair said the difference is due to steps and the timing that the assistant principal was hired.

Ms. Weinstein asked about classroom furniture for an additional section of kindergarten and grade 2. Mr. Belair said they started the replacement plan with existing furniture and need new furniture for these additional classrooms.

Ms. Weinstein asked about the \$22,500 for the theatre program because she had received a flyer that said it was a fully self funded program. Dr. Belair said it represented stipend positions that are part of the teacher contract. The other funds required to put on these productions come through the various sources of fund raising. Dr. Keating said there was \$15,000 projected revenue and expenses \$14,775. Ms. Weinstein asked if any of the kids working as lighting supervisor or sound supervisor work for credit instead of money and would that be something that they would consider. Mr. Belair said they would have to have that conversation with the folks connected with the play.

Mr. Muller asked if they could discuss the progress on the plan to perhaps bring special education students in district. Dr. Belair said they have a number of students that require some services and if they could collaborate with neighboring districts with particular types of programmatic services and house them here in the district, they see that as a potential cost savings, as well as greater control over the services. Not only might it be a cost containment approach, but it may also be a revenue generated approach.

Ms. Weinstein asked about them budgeting the outplacements assuming a 3% inflation rate. She asked if they had spoken to the facilities to see what they are going to do with the rates. Dr. Keating said that it was too early in the year.

Mr. Muller asked about the reduction of \$50,499 for physical therapy services to be delivered by district staff. Lois Pernice said physical therapy has always been a contracted service and they had tried to move it into a Board of Education position so that they would have more control and reduction in cost but they have been unable to fill it. The budget anticipates bringing the position back in house.

Mr. Muller asked about substitute teachers. Dr. Keating said that these are substitute teachers that replace teachers who are pulled for training.

Mr. Muller asked what we do with all the old 6 year plus computers. Dr. Belair said that they are looking to refurbish 75 of those computers and they are looking at recycling some of the older equipment.. They are looking to purchase 125 new computers.

Mr. Muller asked if it was a radical concept to move to a model where kids are bringing their own computers. Dr. Belair said that they are exploring that as they speak. They need to look at it very closely around security issues.

Mr. Muller asked about the relative benefits of rejoining the Connecticut Board of Education Association. Mr. Schaefer said the Board of Education thinks it is a very good organization to be part of especially as we are trying to reach out to other districts. They organize a lot of meetings among the school systems. They have been allowing them to participate in different things gratis but it is tough to be going to these things knowing that they are not dues paying members. The dues are down about half of what they were.

Ms. Weinstein asked about the ratio of secretaries to administrators. Dr. Belair said the question was raised last spring and part of their process was to go back and take a look at all of those positions and examine them very carefully. They looked at the job description and upgraded it to reflect what the individual positions do. In the budget, under the funded, unfunded and under funded mandates you see a significant requirement related to reports. Those reports are primarily handled by the secretarial staff and they are not just specific to one particular department.

Ms. Weinstein went through the different administrators that had full time secretaries and asked them to take another look. Dr. Belair said they looked at that very closely.

Mr. Muller asked how David Lustberg's job fits in with the budgeting of the \$63,600 energy education cost. We are paying \$63,600 but the cost savings is \$143,000 so it is a net \$88,000 savings.

Mr. Gilbert asked about OPEB and the impact on the budget with what the funding levels are going to have to be. Dr. Keating said that they have an aggressive payback of 10 years and the Town is going to have to think about what that is going to mean to the tax payer when we get into the very high years. Ms. Weinstein said that we were hoping that eventually they will let us bond, but the state is having so many issues themselves that they do not want to talk about the bonding possibilities.

At 9:29 pm Mr. Muller made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Ms. Weinstein seconded and the motion passed unanimously.

Respectfully submitted

Judy M. DeVito
Administrative Assistant
Approved 04/01/10