

**Board of Finance Special Meeting
March 5, 2025 6:00 pm
Meeting Held Remotely**

Call to Order: BOF Chairman Michael Imber called the meeting to order at 6:00 pm. Also in attendance were BOF members Vice Chairman Jeffrey Farr, Rone Baldwin, Theresa Brasco, Christopher Bryant, Daniel Gershburg, Jeffrey Goldstein, BOE Chairman Steve Ezzes, WPS Superintendent Lisa Barbiero, WPS Director of Finance and Operations Phil Cross, Assistant Superintendent Dr. Tina Henckel, Director of Facilities, Michael DelMastro, Director of Digital Learning and Technology, Dan DiVito. Mr. Imber called the meeting and welcomed new BOF member Daniel Gershburg.

Discussion concerning the Board of Education's proposed budget for FY 2025-20266: Superintendent Barbiero reviewed the Board of Education's proposed budget as recommended by the Board of Selectmen which includes a 3.05% increase from the previous year. Enrollment projections indicate a decrease of 33 students next year. Class sizes and section numbers were discussed. Budget allocation reviewed: 59% salaries, 20% employee benefits, 10% other services, 5% supplies, 4% property services, 2% professional and technical, 1% equipment and less than 1% in other objects.

For staffing the budget includes a reduction of 7.0 FTE's. Salary increases discussed are based on negotiated union contracts and salaries represent 59% of the budget with the driver in the budget for benefits and increases in health insurance rates.

Ms. Edwards discussed PPP and Special Education noting that staffing will remain consistent, with some shifts in paraeducator positions. Also discussed was an increase in out-of-district tuitions and a decrease in the excess cost reimbursement rate noted to help offset. Reduction in settlement lines noted based on current placements and projected needs.

Superintendent Barbiero and BOE Chairman Ezzes discussed the BOE Capital Budget proposal of \$3,336,000 which was revised by the BOS to \$1,710,000. Key projects are district wide security initiatives, District PA replacement, WIS playground renovation, district wide parking lot/driveway paving, furniture, district wide energy efficiency upgrades including WIS valve replacement, HES boiler pumps and HES HVAC replacement, and radio upgrades.

Detailed questions and comments on the operating and capital budget were asked by the BOF. Highlights were:

Summary budget decline in revenue offsets – Mr. Cross discussed a reduction in state reimbursement rates, decrease in transfer credits, and non-resident tuition decreases.

Salaries and wages – Clarification was asked on the increase due to teachers moving from one step to another, less the 7FTE reductions.

Benefits Increase – Health insurance, social security and pension increases. Pension reconciliation is a follow up item for BOF to review. BOE's budget assumes that the district switches its health insurance coverage to the state health insurance plan, subject to the concurrence of the teachers' union. As a

consequence of the change to the state plan, Mr. Cross indicated that the retired BOE employees' draw against the OPEB Trust Fund would increase to approximately \$400,000 in FY2026. Mr. Imber asked that Mr. Cross collaborate with Rick Darling, TOW Finance Director, to prepare a reconciliation of the OPEB Trust Fund between FY2025 and the proposed FY2026 budget, reflecting both TOW and BOE needs.

Materials/Books Increase – Dr. Henckel discussed replenishment of library and classroom books, WIS reading program well as AP, state standard requirements etc. They do not go out to bid mostly due to course requirements. Increase in equipment due to support computer science discussed.

Electricity Distribution costs – Mr. Cross discussed recent increases in electricity distribution costs, further follow up.

IT Equipment – Purchase and estimated replenishment costs of chrome books, RFP procurement and discussion on tariffs.

Town Field/Revenue - Increase for the town for field use. Town pays District and an increase for use of the fields. Follow up item for BOF review.

Enrollment Projections – Questions on variations of enrollment projections was asked. Projected birth rates discussed by BOF as a big assumption for long term projections. Enrollment is a key variable when it pertains to budget, all data sources should be looked at not just the Demographer.

Security Initiatives - A special executive session will be held to discuss the details of district-wide security initiatives on March 18,19, or 20.

PA System Replacement - The need for replacing outdated PA systems in all schools was emphasized.

Energy Management Software - An upgrade to the energy management system was discussed, with no expected cost saving on energy efficiency.

Playground Renovations - Addressing water runoff and deteriorating asphalt at the intermediate school playground.

Parking Lot Maintenance - Continued maintenance and paving of school parking lots based on assessments by the Beta Group.

HVAC Projects - Detailed discussions on the need for HVAC replacements at Hurlbutt Elementary School and the high school locker rooms. WIS VAV box actuator replacement and North House HVAC needs was discussed with the BOF requesting design and final estimates for the North House HVAC with discussion of RFP process and future budgeting for HVAC system.

Radio Upgrade - Upgrading the radio system to integrate with the town's new system, was not included in the LMR upgrade costs.

Additional Information: The Board of Finance requested additional information on several budget items, including health insurance, OPEB drawdowns, and the process for hiring a design firm for the HVAC project.

Adjournment: Mr. Imber asked for a motion to adjourn, motion made by Mr. Bryant, seconded by Mr. Goldstein. Meeting adjourned at 9:25 pm.

Respectfully Submitted, Shawn Amato, Recording Secretary