

Joint Meeting of Finance Committee/School Committee  
Minutes

Zoom Number 853 9972 6554

2024 JAN 30 AM 7:57

Date: January 10, 2024

Time: 7:00 p.m.

Present: Pratt, O'Connell, Cooper, O'Connor, Wells, Kuphal

Absent: Cooney

Meeting called to order at 7:07 p.m.

Motioned by Pratt, seconded by Cooper to accept the minutes of December 4, 2023 as written.  
Unanimous.

Meeting with the School Committee to discuss the FY25 Budget.

Jennifer Barrett, Finance Director and Karyn Clark, Acting Town Manager were present at the meeting.

Greg Myers, Superintendent of Schools, went over the proposed FY25 School Budget.

Greg Myers: There will also be budget hearings on February 7th and 14th. The Public Hearing on the budget will be on February 28, 2024, followed by a vote on the budget.

Greg Myers: The increase in the budget is to maintain what we already have. Most of it is for staff and to maintain services. We had received \$2.1million from ESSER and that was used during COVID. This was used to purchase all of the PPE's, update air quality in all buildings and technology updates. Some of the positions we added with this money have proved essential. We are working towards keeping our students here rather than out of district placement. The proposed budget is \$26,340,641 for FY2025. This represents a 3.94% increase over the last budget. More than half of the increase is contractual salaries. We are shifting 7 of the 13 new salaries from ESSER to the budget. These new positions were added over the last 3 years to deal with the needs of the students during COVID.

Judith O'Connor: Parents asked for the child to have these special services out-of-district. Will they have a say on whether they come back?

Greg Myers: We work as a team. It will be their decision.

Christine Warren: The Parent Advisory Committee is a part of the process also. The parents want their child to have some sense of belonging in the community.

Christopher Wilbur discussed the investments of bringing students back, including 1:1 aides and the BCBA's.

William Pratt: How much of the additional staff was anticipated before the Federal funds?

Christopher Wilbur: One 1.

William Pratt: Where, in this budget, will we see the money going down, if we are getting more efficient?

Greg Myers: By adding our own programs to help with these students, we will save some money on the out-of-district placements.

William Pratt: We are going to have to be intensely focused with the total budget this year.

Christopher Wilbur: If we cut the 6 positions, you will probably see more out-of-district placements.

Jen O'Connell: When does the pressure go onto the parents with regards to behaviors? I understand that we are also dealing with medical issues with some students. Why does the Town have to feel the brunt of transportations in addition to education for the outside placements? The State mandates certain things that the Town has to provide without their help.

Greg Myers: Increases have been received from Chapter 70 by the current administration.

Jen O'Connell: There is going to be a lot of pushback, not just on the School side, but on the Town side as well.

Russell Wells: How much of the budget is Special Education?

Richard Bedard: \$2.1million or 23-24%. We get about \$1.1million from Circuit Breaker. We get a 75% reimbursement. The Student Opportunity Act changed the funding on the Foundation Budget. They look at actual Special Education students now. We also receive Medicaid Reimbursement from our Medicaid eligible students. This amounts to about \$125,000 per year. We have to apply for the reimbursement. All of the budget information is on line for anyone that wants to see it.

Richard Bedard, Business Manager, went over the financial portion of the budget.

Richard Bedard: Since we have less Building Committee meetings, the clerical amount went down for the School Committee. You will also see some fluctuations in the budget, as we have moved some items to where they are more appropriate. Postage is down considerably because we are using more technology. The Summer School Program total is \$100,000. This is a 4-5 week program mainly for our Special Education students, but it is also for our students that are struggling. There is an increase in Substitute Teachers due to adding a permanent building sub for each building. We have found that this is working out well. With the small number of subs in the district, at least we know that we have at least one sub in the building at all times. The permanent subs are paid from ESSER funds. Curriculum Development was under ESSER, now it is in the budget.

Russell Wells: Why are the Instructional Coaches so important?

Greg Myers: The Instructional Coaches are there to help show the teachers another way of teaching.

Lizz Boutiette: They are in the classrooms to model some of the strategies that were learned during a Professional Development.

Greg Myers: Transportation Bids were just received. We share the transportation cost for Norfolk Aggi with other towns. We also need to provide transportation for the homeless. We cost-share 50/50 with another school district. Assabet Valley does the out-of-district transportation.

Russell Wells: Is there a limit to how far we will go for out-of-district placement?

Jennifer Nietupski: We will bring our students wherever they need to go.

Richard Bedard: It is usually no more than an hour away.

Richard Bedard: All of our buildings are natural gas now. We no longer deal with #2 Fuel Oil. The solar panels have not been turned on yet. Once they are on, we will see some more savings. We are continuing with our preventive maintenance on our roofs. The High School is not eligible for help from the State. We would only qualify for grant money if we can install solar panels. Mr. Myers is working with Senator Moore on this.

#### Windle Field Budget

Richard Bedard: There are some revolving funds in this budget. The tennis courts and pickleball courts should be starting construction in the spring. The tennis courts are going where the current ones are and the pickleball courts are going where the basketball courts were. There will be no basketball courts there. We have several locations that have them.

Jen O'Connell: Do other clubs get a portion of the budget similar to the athletic amount?

Greg Myers: I can look that up and get back to you.

Richard Bedard: We have increased support for non-athletic events in the past few years.

Christopher Wilbur: Any income we get from other Towns that use our fields goes into a revolving fund, so that when the turf needs to be replaced, we do not have to go back to the taxpayers for the funding.

Jen O'Connell: Can't we use some of that money to pay for the additional salaries?

Christopher Wilbur: We could do that, but what do we do when the turf needs to be replaced and all of the Free Cash is spoken for? This is our way of being proactive over the cost of the turf.

Motioned by Pratt, seconded by Wells to adjourn at 9:21 p.m. Unanimous.

*Jen O'Connell*  
*Chris Capra Jr.*  
*W. H. Beart*  
*Russell Wells*  
*Greg Myers*  
*Christopher Wilbur*