

**MINUTES OF THE HINGHAM SCHOOL COMMITTEE AND
THE EDUCATION SUBCOMMITTEE OF THE ADVISORY COMMITTEE
JOINT BUDGET WORK SESSION**

January 26, 2020

1:00PM

SCHOOL DEPARTMENT CONFERENCE ROOM

220 Central Street

Hingham, MA 02043

School Committee members present: Michelle Ayer, Nes Correnti, Carlos DaSilva, Libby Lewiecki, Kerry Ni, Liza O'Reilly, Ed Schreier.

Administrators present: Dr. Paul Austin, Dr. Jamie LaBillois, John Ferris

1. The meeting was called to order by Michelle Ayer at 1:02PM.
2. Dr. Austin gave an overview of the proposed School Department operating budget for FY '21 (see budget presentation). The goal of the Committee and administration is to assess the needs of the district and craft a budget designed to move Hingham Public Schools into the 21st Century. Michelle Ayer noted that the Committee recognizes that all needs will not be met this year, as Hingham has a finite amount of revenue and needs across all departments. However, to meet the needs of all students and to protect the town, it is vital to start the conversation about School Department needs and the direction the Department should go because our schools have been slipping as compared to our benchmark towns.

Dr. Austin gave a brief overview of School Department strengths and challenges. He reviewed HPS enrollment, which continues to increase. He reviewed student performance on MCAS, SATs, ACTs and AP exams. Hingham students continue to perform well. He reviewed the Special Education budget and noted that the department may need to utilize the Special Education reserve fund because of some unanticipated out of district placements this year. He noted that the areas of need in the Special Education department continue to be difficult to predict and have changed drastically over the past 15 years. Additionally, he reviewed the facilities challenges of the department. John Ferris noted that the department works off of a 5 year plan based on an asset inventory. Dr. Austin noted that a status quo budget only containing contractually required increases would require a 4.44% increase over FY '20.

The Committees discussed Hingham's per pupil expenditures as compared to benchmark towns. Hingham currently ranks the lowest of our benchmark towns in education spending and is in the bottom quartile of Massachusetts. It was inquired whether given the excellent performance of our students, we were getting a bargain by

spending so little on our schools. Dr. Austin replied that the budget had been well managed, but the cracks are beginning to show; although student performance is historically good, underfunding our schools presents a risk that this will not continue. Additionally, Dr. LaBillois noted that many families in Hingham are able to supplement their children's education, but the students who most rely on the school system are not always able to access the supports therein. This can be seen in the slipping math performance of some of our students. One of the operating budget proposals for FY '21 is the start of an academic tiered system of support to ensure that HPS meets the academic needs of all students. When asked whether our benchmark towns offer a similar system, Dr. LaBillois affirmed that they did. When asked whether Hingham teachers are underpaid, John Ferris noted that they are paid well, but that there are fewer of them than in our benchmark towns, resulting in larger class sizes. Dr. Austin noted that the department's objective is not necessarily to increase the per pupil expenditure, but to meet the needs of all students.

3. Dr. Austin gave an overview of the School Department budget proposals for FY '21 operating budget (see budget presentation). He explained the budget development process, which involved collaboration with all of the principals. Categories included "Fully Funded Budget", "Critical Needs", "Highly Critical Needs", "Most Critical Needs" and "Status Quo Budget", which would only cover department contractual obligations and the cost of keeping the lights on. One of the proposals in the "Most Critical" category was a Public Relations/Communications contract. It was noted that the Town is seeking to hire a PR person and suggested that the School Department could coordinate with the town on this. It was noted that 83% of the proposed School budget is personnel contracts.

The Committees discussed budget offsets, including grants and fees in revolving accounts. It was noted that there is a two-year delay in MA Circuit breaker reimbursement and that it only covers 75% of the amount spent over \$44,000 per student. It was also noted that Title I funds are not designed to supplant money in the school budget, but to provide programming over and above the school budget. The School Committee noted that it will be discussing Athletic/Activity Fees in the near future.

4. The Committee discussed a Warrant Article for a revision to or additional funds for the feasibility study for Foster Elementary School. A grammatical adjustment was suggested.
5. The Committee discussed a Statement of Interest for replacing Plymouth River School windows and a Warrant Article for feasibility funds. The School Committee has voted in favor of submitting a SOI to the MSBA and is awaiting a vote by the Board of Selectmen. It was noted that a Warrant Article is not necessary because a feasibility study would be funded by money allocated from the Alliance Development project. The School Committee asked the Advisory Committee for their support with the Board of Selectmen.

6. The Committee received an update on the TRACES program. Building 12, the program's former location, is no longer safe for occupancy and the town does not have another suitable space. School Administration located commercial space on Libbey Industrial Parkway in Weymouth, which will likely work as a short term fix. Rent for the space is \$5,000/month, which would come out of the School Department operating budget. It was suggested that the Committee submit a Warrant Article to sprinkle Building 179 so that it could be used by TRACES, the Robotics team and potentially for other purposes. There was some concern about restrictions on the property. Other possible locations were discussed.
7. The Committees discussed the School Department capital needs for the FY '21 budget. The Department requested \$2.2 million in capital requests, of which \$440,000 were for technology. The idea of moving the technology requests from the capital budget to the operating budget was discussed. John Ferris listed the capital issues that have grown over a number of years, including Buildings 12 & 179, Foster, the High School boilers, the roof at South. When asked how much money would be needed on a yearly basis to meet capital needs, he replied \$1.5 million, excluding technology. It was noted that the Town fund balance is higher than it should be, approximately \$7.5 million above the formula. It was noted that the School Department is exploring the idea of installing solar panels at the High School, which would generate money for the town. The Committee discussed the potential of combining this possibly project with the High School boiler project.
8. It was agreed to cancel the next scheduled School Committee budget session on January 30, 2020 and meet after the Board of Selectmen and Advisory Committee budget meeting on February 11, 2020.
9. On a motion by Ed Schreier and seconded by Kerry Ni,

It was

Voted: To adjourn at 3:50PM.

Respectfully Submitted By:
Kerry Ni

Documents:

Agenda

Preliminary FY'21 Budget Breakdown

Foster Feasibility Warrant Article Draft

Article for Capital to Make Building 179 Suitable for Occupancy