

School Committee Joint Meeting with Select Board and Advisory Committee

Minutes of the February 8, 2022 Meeting

1. Call to order

The School Committee was called to order at 7:03 PM

In attendance via Zoom:

School Committee Members participating remotely: Kerry Ni, Michelle Ayer, Nes Correnti, Liza O'Reilly, Carlos Da Silva, Jen Benham, Tim Dempsey

Administration participating remotely: John Ferris, Dr. Gary Maestas, Dr. Jamie LaBillois

All Members, Administration and Visitors participating remotely

2. Joint Session with the Select Board and Advisory Committee

- FY23 Preliminary Financial Forecast Update
Tom Mayo, Town Administrator, provided the update: current deficit is \$4.7M, down from \$7.2 M from the first forecast update. Questions from the Select Board, Advisory Committee and School Committee were taken.
- FY23 School Department Budget Presentation
Dr. Gary Maestas gave a brief overview of how the budget was developed this year. He acknowledged it was difficult putting together a budget when there are so many needs in the town to contend with. There were a number of teaching positions added as a result of prior year's budget process. Those positions were able to be hired due to funding received from federal COVID relief funding. In order to continue with those positions, the district has to fund them going forward. A new school building for Foster Elementary is being considered, to be voted on in the near future. Considered all the economic conditions the town is going through, i.e. possible operational override, along with the added positions and Foster School funding; the administration wants to ensure we approach the school budget that is responsible given those economic conditions.

Dr. Maestas also recognized the service and dedication of John Ferris. Mr. Ferris will be retiring at the end of the school year.

John Ferris presented a detailed review of the FY23 budget, acknowledging that the full School Committee voted to approve the budget at the February 7, 2022 School Committee meeting. Total proposed budget for FY'23 is \$62,677,112. Total change in the budget is 1.43% increase or \$885,054. Increase of General Ed status quo budget is 3.83% (\$1,563,602). For Special Ed there is a decrease in the budget of 4.18% (642,271). There is a budget decrease in Vocational Tuition of 17.10% (\$36,277).

Mr. Ferris discussed enrollment trends and how enrollment is projected. He noted the historical trend of students leaving to go to private schools in grades 7 and 9. He noted

the drop in Special Education relates to a drop in out of district payments as students are aging out of the programming. Vocational Tuition is down due to students graduating from the program.

Mr. Ferris noted the following:

- Highlighted increases in Energy costs
- Lease for TRACES program is \$61k; no space in town therefore we lease space in Weymouth
- Central Office additions include: Full year of Media and Communications, Data Analysis support, HR Clerical Support, Payroll and Benefits Manager
- District additions include: Assessment Tools, a Fine Arts Director, late bus for the High School, substitutes, two additional vans for special education runs and two van drivers. John Ferris noted the ongoing discussions about moving the technology costs out of the capital budget and into the operating budget. The administration is proposing to make that change in FY'24. Also, a Director of Equity and Inclusion is being proposed for FY'25.
- Mr. Ferris then noted the proposed additions for each school. Several additions noted for the High School for FY'23 and outer years. Music teacher needed at Middle School and PRS. One additional counselor needed for each elementary school to take responsibility over social-emotional support of the students.
- Mr. Ferris noted that there were requests made from Athletics. The School Committee requested that unified sports needs be funded if possible.
- FY '23 Offsets to Budget Proposal
John Ferris discussed the offsets to the budget relating to Grants, Circuit Breaker, Full-Day Kindergarten, Kids in Action and Revolving accounts.
- John Ferris noted some budget risks: Pending VoTech applications, soaring energy prices, new special education placements out of district (have an existing special education reserve if needed), significant ramp up of COVID expenses without reimbursement.

Kerry Ni read a statement from the School Committee in support of the proposed budget as presented by Dr. Maestas and John Ferris.

Michelle Ayer reiterated Kerry Ni's comments and thanked John Ferris, Dr. Maestas and administration for time and energy into this budget request. She stated she believes it is a responsible budget recognizing the finite resources of the town but one that also meets the needs of the students.

Nes Correnti stated she is part of the Equity and Inclusion Task Force. There was discussion about getting a Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Director last year. The district is working with a coach this year. The need for a DEI Director has not gone away; the district needs to do more work on belonging in the district before bringing a DEI Director on. The Equity team wants to ensure the roll out is being done thoughtfully so that it is done right and not rushed.

Questions were asked by Select Board and Advisory Committee members, as well as a community member.

John Ferris presented three school related warrant articles:

1. Warrant Article X – Tennis Court Reconstruction
Joint article with the Recreation Department. In cooperation with the turf management group, both School Committee and Recreation Commission support a complete restoration of the 6 courts at the Hingham High School. The recommended method is Post Tension Concrete as opposed to Asphalt. Post tension concrete offers a longer life (25 years vs. 15) and an overall lower cost of ownership as it requires significantly less maintenance over the life of the asset.

Bill Ramsey voted in favor of the warrant, seconded by Liz Klein, all were in favor.

2. Warrant Article Y – Correct the Funding Source for the Plymouth River Window Project

Current funding source is the School Committee FY22 Operating Budget.

Liz Klein voted in favor of the warrant, seconded by Bill Ramsey, all were in favor.

3. Warrant Article Z – Five-year lease for Special Education Vans:

Massachusetts procurement law allows for 3-year leases. More than three years requires a majority vote by Town Meeting. The 5-year lease will result in the Town owning the vehicles after making payments. Vehicles typically last 8+ years. Total amount is \$13k.

Bill Ramsey voted in favor of the warrant, seconded by Liz Klein, all were in favor.

4. Warrant Article EE – Foster School Funds for Pre-Construction costs and to open the Town Meeting Warrant for Submission of a Revised Article for the Foster Elementary School.

Ray Estes presented on behalf of the School Building Committee. The revised warrant article includes comments from the MSBA. Interim funding for the Foster School Project to get through the design phase of the project. A separate Town Meeting will be held to vote on funding the full construction of Foster, hoping for Fall 2022.

Liz Klein voted in favor of the warrant, seconded by Bill Ramsey, all were in favor.

3. Adjourn

On a motion made by Michelle Ayer and seconded by Nes Correnti, the School Committee meeting was adjourned at 9:23 PM.

Respectfully submitted by Nes Correnti, Secretary