
Triboard Meeting
Select Board/School Committee/Finance Committee
Wednesday, March 11, 2020

I. Call to Order/Roll Call

Chairwoman Gregory called the Triboard Meeting to order at 7:04 P.M. in the School Committee Meeting Room in the School Administration Building. Present from the Select Board: Annie Gilbert, Chris Huntress, Dan Koh, and Alex Vispoli.

Finance Committee Chair Eugenie (Janie) Moffitt called the Finance Committee to order. Members present from the Finance Committee: Linn Anderson, Bojay Taylor, Paul Monticello, Spiro Christopoulos, Paul Russo, Mary Ellen Logee, Andrew Betts, John Barry

School Committee Chair Joel Blumstein called the School Committee to order. Present from the School Committee: Tracey Spruce, Susan McCready, and Shannon Scully.

Others Present: Town Manager Andrew Flanagan, Superintendent Dr. Sheldon Berman, Asst. Town Manager Patrick Lawlor, Finance Director Donna Walsh, and Paul Szymanski, Assistant Superintendent for Finance and Administration. The meeting was duly posted and cablecast live.

II. Opening Ceremonies/Moment of Silence/Pledge of Allegiance

The meeting began with a Moment of Silence followed by a Salute to the Flag.

III. Presentation of FY2021 School Department Budgets/CIP

Mr. Blumstein gave an overview of the budget. This budget means the Town Manager's proposal of having a 3.86% increase. The Chapter 70 came in significantly less than expected – the Town Manager projected a 4% in Chapter 70. Governor's proposal is under 1.5%. Even though there is a new Student Opportunity Act, the bulk of the money is going to the poorer urban districts – as it should. After FY22, we should most likely expect to get the minimum of state aid. The SC will be putting forward a warrant article for Town Meeting for a supplemental increase of \$212,000 to cover unforeseen expenses during this school year.

Dr. Berman reviewed the school district facts. Enrollment is stable with a slight decrease at the middle school level. What has stabilized is the percent of students on free and reduced lunch which is about 10% unless we head into a recession. ELL population has leveled off – back to the FY16 numbers. These students have performed very well in state tests. We have leveled off at class size for the most part – which is about 21 student/class resulting in performance increases. MCAS increase in scores has been significant. We were able to intervene early at various students' grade level which helped performance. Significant changes, in particular, in

Students with Disabilities have reduced the percentages to single digits. There have been significant interventions as all grade levels with our programs.

The district invested in a new high school schedule which created year-long courses. 84% of teachers said that H Block was very effective; 77% of students felt the same way. This helped with student learning. The district is building on having more in-district programs for Special Ed students. The Out of District (OOD) placement has also been affected – although at this time the number is at 89 students. SPED transportation both in and out of district has risen dramatically over the last couple years due to contracts; regular education costs has gone down. We have also had some unexpected situations and had to add 5 vans in-district (\$630,000). For all units, it is almost a 1.5% increase overall in the budget-- without any COLA - for step and track changes. Legal costs have gone up substantially this year (14 grievances in process, injunction costs, etc); homeless transportation has gone up; athletics program's revenue has decreased mainly due to scheduling games because of Triple E virus concerns. We had some budget increases in special education staffing for the Bridge program. Also, we have added staffing for students, in particular for those individuals with emotional and physical disabilities which has skyrocketed. Transition programs have been created for students to re-enter the district due to OOD student disabilities. We've created a Tier 3 program piloted at Doherty, the 3 tiers of intervention: core, supports in the classroom and exceptional supports provided by additional specialists.

Some of our initial priorities were to increase the following: Human Resource staffing; AHS SPED Program Head; AHS Tier 3 Program teacher; Elementary Math Coaches; Custodial Supervisor; Registered Behavioral Technicians; MS Math Specialist and AHS Technology Manager and adding busses to eliminate second runs. State aid added \$300 million to Chapter 70, but 15 districts received 85% of available statewide Chapter 70 aid, we were not one of those districts. This was a significant difference in anticipated aid to this district. Our minimum contribution grew more than the Foundation Budget (2.5% vs 1.55% increase). The decrease in enrollment did not affect the minimum contribution – which we did not anticipate. The legislators didn't project what state aid we would be receiving this year. Ms. Moffitt noted that we will need to rethink our assumptions going forward. Mr. Blumstein noted they have reached out to the local state representatives for assistance. We have a level service budget, these are the additions are a Bridge teacher, added a teacher for the Tier 3 program and 2 buses to eliminate second runs. There are bus routes with 2 runs – consisting of 6 buses. This creates an equity and financial issue. IAs must be paid to wait for students for those second runs and often teachers have bus duties. Four of the five elementary schools and middle/high schools now have second runs. Time could be better used, so we would like to eliminate the 2nd runs which will make the system efficient. Also, there is only 1 bidder for the transportation contract so competition isn't there and not any other viable options.

Dr. Berman continued and explained the FY20 unanticipated OOD student placements. He explained the Town Meeting article they recommend would be for \$212,000 which will offset this year's unexpected costs. The district is also applying for extraordinary relief which is state aid for circumstances like this. If assistance is given, then the school district won't need the

Town Meeting article – but Dr. Berman stated we won't know this until May. Ms. Scully stated that the SC discusses each year how much money to keep in the circuit breaker as a responsible level which is now \$500,000. However, this year the district had this an unanticipated expense. Therefore, the SC for this year would hope to recoup some of that expense in the form of a TM article of \$212,000 –coincidentally the same amount the Town received in Chapter 70 aid this fiscal year.

Dr. Berman discussed the elimination of Full Day Kindergarten tuition. When we received the notice of State aid, there was a close look of where we now stand. There are a number of factors that influence the Foundation Budget – enrollment, wage adjustment, inflation, property value, income, and municipal revenue growth factor-which rose. Part of the DOR Municipal Growth Factor was partially because of the gas explosion crisis.- a one-time issue.

Our estimate is of FY22 Foundation Budget will be \$68,600,000. The Municipal Growth Factor increases the town contribution. The better the town does, the less aid you receive. The Committee is committed to discontinue full day kindergarten tuition for 2020-2021 school year (2021). The contingency is \$90,000 in the revolving budget that should be a cushion for next year. Ms. Scully stated that part of the plan was to spend all the reserve in the revolving account. Instead the SC will not spend all of the reserve and instead spend \$90,000 in the FY21 budget and save some for the FY22 budget.

The Town Manager stated the biggest variable is new growth which he projects 4.5% that will have the greatest influence on the state aid formula. Ms. Scully noted that the estimate of \$68,600,000 is the estimate with a move to tuition free for Full Day Kindergarten. If we didn't move to FDK, that number would be less. The mechanics have not changed in the Student Opportunity Act. Dr. Berman added the formula has been consistent since 1993. The Town Manager noted this represents the total money in Chapter 70 aid. The entire increase in Chapter 70 will offset the costs of providing free ADK and the rest of the increase in revenue will offset everything else.

Spiro Christophulos stated there seem to be a potential possibly for some deficit. He would like to see creative approaches to reduce this number and see some trades in future budgets. Dr. Berman said he wanted to remind the members that as a base this can be done, but there will be a 2% increase for free ADK. Mr. Betts inquired if the school department had any idea if there are any significant increases in OOD for next year. Dr. Berman said he was not aware of any at this date, they can only build in potential placements. However, the Coronavirus issue may present a myriad of expenditures that the district isn't anticipating. That is an unknown in how long or how much that will be and staffing overtime issues may be a result. The school district has already purchased special equipment to sanitize the schools and additional custodial help will most likely be needed.

The Town Manager said the Attorney General's office hosted a call with all city and town solicitors to discuss what type of relief they may need for the continuity of operations into the new Fiscal Year. This is total uncharted waters. He hopes to have more information in the following weeks. Ms. Moffitt asked about the OOD meetings and whether they will continue –

as those meetings were very helpful in understanding and seeing some of where the costs came from. Mr. Szymanski will be setting up a meeting. One last point, Dr. Berman stated that he would like to set up a revolving account at Town Meeting to take in revenue for professional training hosted in the district.

Ms. McCready acknowledged and thanked Joel Blumstein for his many years in service in the SC as a member and Chair. He will be stepping down after the March elections.

IV. Adjournment

The Select Board on a motion by Annie Gilbert and seconded by Chris Huntress voted to adjourn.

The School Committee on a motion by Susan McCready and seconded by Tracey Spruce voted to adjourn.

The Finance Committee on a motion by Paul Russo and seconded by Andrew Betts voted to adjourn. At 8:24P.M. the Triboard Meeting was adjourned.

Respectfully submitted,
Alison Phelan -Recording Secretary