

Finance Committee Meeting Minutes Monday, February 28, 2022

Present: (Z – zoom)

Finance Committee

Roll Call 13 in attendance:

Mark Trudell

Dennis Crowley

Josette Burke

Allyson Hamilton

Brian Bain (Z)

Susan Lawson (Z)

Kathleen Foley Greulich (Z)

Lucy Romanowiz (Z)

Jean Kenney (Z)

Douglas Shea

Mark Sullivan

Lisa Van der Linden

Lawrence Pitman

Absent: Steve Hendricks, Jeff Fisher

Additional attendees:

Jim Johnson, Patrick Shield, Karen Maguire, Daniel Haynes, John Martin, John Wallace, Bridget Gough, Mike Friscia, Bill Buckley, Nancy Gallivan

The meeting was called to order by Mark Trudell at 7:00pm.

Education Budget Review & Discussion

Tri-County Regional Vocational Technical High School- Superintendent Karen Maguire and School Business Administrator Daniel Haynes presented the school's proposed budget. Karen Maguire stated that there are currently 83 Walpole students enrolled, and applications for next year suggest that number may rise. Mr. Sullivan asked why the per-student cost for Walpole has risen so much since last year, and Daniel Hayes stated that part of the increase comes from a rise in the required minimum contribution, which is calculated by the state. Mr. Bain asked if Tri-County students have to pay for extra fees like extracurricular activities and transportation. Daniel Haynes stated that students pay for their activities but there is no bus fee. Karen Maguire stated that Tri-County has a 92% work placement rate.

Norfolk Country Agricultural High School- Superintendent John Martin and Business Manager John Wallace presented the school's proposed budget. Mr. Pitman asked why tuition costs are lower than what had previously been projected for this year. John Wallace stated that the first projection was just a worst-case estimate and the new figure is more realistic. Ms. Hamilton requested that in the future there is more advanced notice as to how much tuition increases will be each year. John Wallace stated that there are currently no plans for upcoming capital projects that would have an impact on future tuition costs. He assured that this increase from last year is not indicative of future increases and that next year's budget will not be substantially higher than this one. John Wallace described the school's different sources of revenue and explained how they calculated Walpole's contribution to its budget. Mr. Trudell asked about enrollment trends, and John Wallace stated that the new building was designed to increase the school's occupancy to 600 students and that they are nearing that number with 585 currently enrolled students from 28 towns.

Walpole Public Schools- Superintendent Bridget Gough and School Business Administrator Mike Friscia presented the school's budget. Ms. Hamilton asked if any other towns were successful in implementing a work study program, and Bridget Gough stated that Dedham and Needham in particular are providing this opportunity for students. Mike Friscia explained that reductions in allocations toward special education and homelessness programs are simply because of a reduced projection in the number of students who will be utilizing them. Paying for Full-Day Kindergarten would help level the playing field for less fortunate families who normally would only be able to afford Half-Day Kindergarten. Bridget Gough explained that in the case of adding new elementary STEM teachers, they will not be hiring new staff, but rather promoting currently working teachers. Mr. Trudell asked if our Special Ed services allow for us to receive enrollments from special needs students outside of Walpole on a tuition basis, and Mike Friscia said yes, but no neighboring communities have a need for that right now. Mr. Sullivan asked about the demographics of the English as a Second Language Program, and Bridget Gough stated that most students in the program come from Brazil and about 11% of all students don't speak English as their first language. Mr. Bain asked why transportation costs have risen, and Mike Friscia explained that it is partially because hiring drivers has been difficult and salary increases are necessary to replace and retain staff. Ms. Hamilton asked about preschool enrollment rates, and Bridget Gough stated that they have a waiting list for new students because they don't have the capacity to accept any more children without raising tuition. Ms. Burke asked about the new combined middle school, and Bridget Gough stated that when they consolidate staff they likely won't need to hire many new teachers. Mr. Sullivan asked about the substantial increase in technology funds, and Mike Friscia stated that because of COVID they had to provide each student with a Chromebook, and that fund is the cost of maintaining them. Nancy Gallivan discussed the ongoing contract negotiations for the teacher, custodial, and secretarial unions. Compared to 16 similar towns, Walpole's tax rate hovers around the average despite the Town's comparatively smaller commercial base. As a result, the schools are trying to petition the state for more financial aid per student.

Town Administrator Jim Johnson suggested deferring votes on the school budgets until 3/10/22.

Approval of Meeting Minutes (9/2/21, 9/9/21, 9/13/21, 9/16/21, 9/27/21, 10/19/21, & 11/23/21)

The committee made minor corrections to the sets of minutes.

Motion by Josette Burke and seconded by Mark Trudell to approve the meeting minutes for 9/2/21 as revised.

The motion passed 9-0-4 (Mr. Crowley, Ms. Hamilton, Mr. Bain, and Mr. Pitman abstained).

Motion by Josette Burke and seconded by Susan Lawson to approve the meeting minutes for 9/9/21 as revised.

The motion passed 11-0-2 (Mr. Crowley and Mr. Bain abstained).

Motion by Josette Burke and seconded by Douglas Shea to approve the meeting minutes for 9/13/21 as revised.

The motion passed 11-0-2 (Mr. Crowley and Mr. Bain abstained).

Mark Trudell moved to defer voting on the minutes for 9/16/21 until the next meeting

Motion by Josette Burke and seconded by Susan Lawson to approve the meeting minutes for 9/27/21 as revised.

The motion passed 9-0-4 (Mr. Crowley, Mr. Bain, Ms. Greulich and Mr. Pitman abstained).

Motion by Josette Burke and seconded by Douglas Shea to approve the meeting minutes for 10/23/21 as revised.

The motion passed 10-0-3 (Mr. Crowley, Mr. Bain, and Mr. Pitman abstained).

Motion by Susan Lawson and seconded by Kathleen Foley Greulich to approve the meeting minutes for 11/23/21 as revised.

The motion passed 9-0-4 (Mr. Pitman, Mr. Crowley, Ms. Burke, and Mr. Bain abstained).

Adjournment

Motion by Dennis Crowley and seconded by Josette Burke to adjourn.

The motion passed 13-0-0.

The Finance Committee adjourned at 10:00pm.