

MINUTES
WEST WARWICK SCHOOL COMMITTEE SPECIAL MEETING
FEBRUARY 24, 2015
JOHN F. DEERING MIDDLE SCHOOL
WEBSTER KNIGHT DRIVE
5:45 P.M.

This meeting was called to order by Stephen Lawton, Chairperson.

Members Present: Stephen Lawton, Chairperson
Christopher Messier, Vice-Chairperson
Patricia Keenan
Luis Colon

Members Absent: Rene Coutu, Clerk

Administrators Present: Karen A. Tarasevich, Superintendent of Schools
Janet Carroll, Title I Coordinator
Joseph Spagna, Director of Financial Operations
Kenneth Townsend, Director of Property Services and
Transportation
Paul Vigeant, Director of Special Education and
Pupil/Personnel Services

Recording Secretary: Michelle M. Colozzo

1. Open Session

Open Session

Mr. Lawton opened the meeting at 5:45 P.M.

2. Roll Call

Roll Call

The following members were present:
Mr. Lawton, Mr. Messier, and Mrs. Keenan. The
following members were absent at roll call:
Mr. Coutu and Mr. Colon.

**3. Motion to go into
Executive Session**

**Motion to go into Executive Session according to
RI General Laws 42-46-4 and 42-46-5, Subsection
(a), Paragraph 1**

Special School Committee Meeting Minutes

February 24, 2015

Page 2 of 9

MOTION

MOTION MADE BY CHRISTOPHER MESSIER THAT THE SCHOOL COMMITTEE GO INTO EXECUTIVE SESSION ACCORDING TO RI GENERAL LAWS 42-46-4 AND 42-46-5, SUBSECTION (a), PARAGRAPH 1. Motion seconded by Stephen Lawton. The following members voted in the affirmative: Patricia Keenan, Christopher Messier, and Stephen Lawton. Motion passed 3 to 0.

4. Executive Session a) Personnel

Executive Session:
a) Personnel

5. Open Session

Open Session

Mr. Lawton opened this portion of the meeting at 6:10 P.M.

6. Roll Call

Roll Call

The following members were present:
Mr. Lawton, Mr. Messier, Mrs. Keenan, and Mr. Colon. The following member was absent:
Mr. Coutu.

7. Motion to Close Executive Session Minutes

Motion to Close Executive Session Minutes

MOTION MADE BY CHRISTOPHER MESSIER THAT THE SCHOOL COMMITTEE CLOSE THE EXECUTIVE SESSION MINUTES. Motion seconded by Patricia Keenan. The following members voted in the affirmative: Luis Colon, Patricia Keenan, Christopher Messier, and Stephen Lawton. Motion passed 4 to 0.

MOTION

8. Budget Workshop

Budget Workshop

Mrs. Tarasevich welcomed everyone to the second public budget workshop. She said with the first one, there was a little glitch because of the snow and the mail.

Special School Committee Meeting Minutes

February 24, 2015

Page 3 of 9

Mrs. Tarasevich said 18 months ago, the town was faced with a difficult decision around the financial situation. We are all caught up with our obligations—that was the good news from last year. Now we are looking to maintain that and move forward.

In the meantime, a lot of great things are going on—progress in technology, not to mention programming for special needs students and programs for general education around RTI.

Mrs. Tarasevich said we are here tonight to present the budget for Fiscal Year 16 and after months of careful consideration and the same commitment to the town's financial stability, the budget balances with the five-year plan. A review of all programs was taken into consideration and remain in compliance with R.I.D.E., the B.E.P., and Title 16. Mrs. Tarasevich said careful consideration is always given to the five-year plan.

Mr. Joseph Spagna presented the FY 16 budget including the following points:

- Reasons for FY 14 anticipated surplus:

Salary – budget of \$28,738,000; realized \$28,190,000, which resulted in a surplus of \$548,000

The main reason is the long-term impact of leaves of absence of teachers and teacher assistants. The positions were either filled or re-hired for people who did not return.

Employee benefits – we budgeted \$14,105,000 and realized \$12,396,000, a \$1.7 million surplus in benefits: \$1,184,000 due to medical and dental expenses—we are very fortunate to have a healthy workforce.

Purchased services: we budgeted \$599,800 and we realized \$546,000, so we saved \$52,000 in services.

Special School Committee Meeting Minutes

February 24, 2015

Page 4 of 9

- FY 16 budget: \$53,842,662
- FY 15 after adjustments in September: \$52,518,825
- Increase of \$1,323,837
- Salary expenses of \$30,541,489
- Increase in teachers' salaries of \$798,000 for step increases, steps 1 to 11 of \$420,00
- 5.4 new teaching positions: \$432,000
- The salary figure of \$30,541,489 is 57% of the budget
- \$285,000 for certified pension
- State employees retirement system is 14.01% in FY '15 and 14.33% in FY '16
- Municipal pension for classified employees increased by \$22,000
- Reduction in the budget for medical \$755,000 based on adjusted working rates and movement to HSA—able to hold dental rates for FY 16
- Budgeting purchased services increased; used most recent Consumer Price Index November 2014.
- Out-of-district tuitions for Special Education: 13% or \$180,400
- Vocational education: 44% or \$410,000
- Charter school enrollment 70% or \$80,000
- Revenue side:
State education aid: \$21,954,439

Special School Committee Meeting Minutes

February 24, 2015

Page 5 of 9

Town of West Warwick: \$31,240,216 consistent with adopted five-year plan

Medicare: \$450,000 – same as last year

Miscellaneous: \$198,000

\$53,842,662 total revenue

- Based on all positions being filled and all funds expended by June 30, 2016
- We won't be fully funded until FY '18; remaining three year phase in for the state funding formula
- Within the five-year plan, there is no request for additional funds from taxes
- \$1,324,000 increase after careful consideration of the district's needs while working to stay within the projected revenues

The School Committee and Mrs. Tarasevich thanked Mr. Spagna.

Mr. David Gosselin, President, West Warwick Town Council, commended the School Committee and the School Department. Mr. Gosselin said the audit showed that the school department has about a \$2.4 million surplus and the school department is requesting from the town an additional \$611,662, a 2% increase over last year's budget.

Mr. Gosselin said he understands you used the five-year plan as a guideline; it just shows that it's a plan; it doesn't mean you really need \$600,000; with a 2.4 million surplus. He said it's going to be hard to go to the taxpayers and say we need a tax increase, but the school department had a surplus.

Mr. Messier said the surplus was from 2014; how about 2015?

Special School Committee Meeting Minutes

February 24, 2015

Page 6 of 9

Mr. Spagna said we won't know for several months. Projections will be done closer to the end of the year. Mrs. Tarasevich said we won't know if there is a surplus or a deficit. She said we prepared the budget based on the five-year plan and how things were approved last year and what the needs were and most of things are out of our control. She said we attacked this budget very frugally and conservatively. Programmatically we revised some of the Special Education programs so we didn't have to ask for more positions, but she knows what Mr. Gosselin is saying.

Mr. Gosselin said the surplus is from 2014; what happens if you have a surplus this year—would you still expect to go to the taxpayers and ask for more money? Mr. Messier answered he didn't know, but we don't know that now; we are up against the clock.

Mr. Padula said we don't know what the state will give us for aid; they are already talking about cutting state aid to the municipalities, and we will have to say no and look like the bad guys. Mrs. Tarasevich said we know that; with the surplus, we want to reserve some of it for just that reason.

Mr. Gosselin said in this budget, you increased your state aid. Mr. Spagna said that is based on enrollment. Mr. Padula asked if we are up on enrollment, and Mr. Spagna said it's been growing, and the state will do the final enrollment on March 16th. He said right now, we are using projected enrollment and we hope it goes up, but it could go down. Mr. Messier said we have to have our budget before we get finalized numbers; we have to plan for the worst.

Mr. Gosselin said in May, the taxpayers vote up or down and you won't have the final numbers until possibly June or July. Mr. Spagna said we will have a much clearer picture when we get the enrollment numbers.

Mrs. Tarasevich asked Mr. Spagna if he would like to address potential situations. Mr. Spagna said he

Special School Committee Meeting Minutes

February 24, 2015

Page 7 of 9

doesn't expect that kind of surplus or that kind of deficit this year. He said we are about 50% through the year, and we have spent about 46% of the budget—we are right on target. Mr. Spagna said the state will cut municipal aid and school aid, and they are talking about charter schools. He said the state funding formula is good for urban schools, but not so good for some others. Mr. Spagna said it is always his recommendation to leave the surplus in place in case they take something.

Mrs. Tarasevich said the five-year plan is a guide. She said we want to make sure we are responsible with the surplus. She said there are definitely things that have been left undone for years because we couldn't afford them. We want to save some of the surplus for that reason and attack some of the problems we have. Mr. Gosselin said it would be great to see Webster Knight Drive done. Mrs. Tarasevich said we have a list of projects, and even with the surplus, that still wouldn't be enough—we prioritize the list based on Mr. Townsend's recommendations for facilities.

Mr. Presley said since the development of the five-year plan, John Cimino and he meet with Mrs. Tarasevich, Mr. Spagna, and Mr. Williamson two or three times a month minimum; they have always been very open about plans. Mr. Presley said we are working together directly and it is a very positive relationship. He said as bad as the financial situation was, it has created a good relationship between the town and the school department. He said it's just like our budget—right now it's a draft. He said it's been nothing but supportive on both sides and that's important because with all of the changes at the state, we have to make sure our house is in order.

Mr. Gosselin said it's a better relationship between the town and the school; that did not happen four to six years ago. It's great—all sides are working together, the School Committee, the Town Council, the Town Manager, and the Superintendent.

Special School Committee Meeting Minutes

February 24, 2015

Page 8 of 9

Mrs. Tarasevich said that's our draft, and we hear the town's concerns that we can take back and consider and go from there. She said we are on a short time line; we need to get this to the School Committee in March to get it to the Town Manager in time.

Mrs. Tarasevich said dialogue is still going on; there are still some things we need to work with and consider.

Mr. Gosselin asked if you plug in any of the holes with the surplus, would that be affected by Title 16?

Mrs. Tarasevich said if we used the surplus for operational expenses, as far as she understands it, no, but it's not good practice because we can't sustain it.

Mr. Padula said he thinks that's a no-no, and

Mr. Williamson said he agrees, but it is a draft; sooner or later you would be right back to where we were.

Mrs. Tarasevich said that's why with the surplus, we want to reserve some for expenses and use some for capital projects we haven't been able to address.

Mr. Gosselin said Title 16 basically says if we give you \$53 million, we have to give the same next year—that's maintenance of effort.

Mr. Messier said we want to make sure we are responsible with the money we have—we want to make sure the surplus is there when we truly need it.

Mrs. Tarasevich said the forecast for years out is based on things that are out of our control—salary, pension increases, those types of things. Mr. Spagna said the biggest expenses are salary and benefits—almost 80% of the budget.

Mr. Spagna said when he got here, he built a personnel supplement by employee—base salary, longevity, medical cost, step increases, longevity increases, all down to one number for the specific employee. He said we take into consideration the age of our personnel—when a higher step individual leaves, we assume a lower step individual will come in, so we assume savings. The budget is built on current staff, then we build in turnover based on age;

Special School Committee Meeting Minutes

February 24, 2015

Page 9 of 9

it also affects our benefits because the working rate is specific to that individual. The medical working rate is we assume 4% a year every year; everyone else is using 7-8%, but that's not what we have realized. Purchased services is according to the Consumer Price Index 1.3%--that's the latest information.

Mr. Lawton said he appreciates everyone coming to the budget workshop tonight.

9. Approval: Non-

Renewal: Non-Tenured
Teacher

Approval: Non-Renewal: Non-Tenured Teacher

Mrs. Tarasevich recommended that the School Committee approve the non-renewal of a non-tenured teacher.

MOTION

MOTION MADE BY CHRISTOPHER R. MESSIER THAT THE SCHOOL COMMITTEE APPROVE THE NON-RENEWAL OF A NON-TENURED TEACHER. Motion seconded by Luis Colon. The following members voted in the affirmative: Patricia Keenan, Luis Colon, Christopher Messier, and Stephen Lawton. Motion passed 4 to 0.

10. Adjournment

MOTION

Adjournment

MOTION MADE BY CHRISTOPHER MESSIER THAT THE SCHOOL COMMITTEE ADJOURN THE MEETING. Motion seconded by Patricia Keenan. The following members voted in the affirmative: Luis Colon, Patricia Keenan, Christopher Messier, and Stephen Lawton. Motion passed 4 to 0.

Meeting adjourned at: 6:40 P.M.

Respectfully submitted,

Christopher R. Messier, Vice-Chairperson

Michelle M. Colozzo, Recorder