

## **UNAPPROVED**

There was a special meeting of the Cumberland School Committee held on Thursday, April 3, 2014 at the Cumberland High School Transitional Building Cafetorium, 2602 Mendon Road, Cumberland, Rhode Island.

**Members Present:** Lisa Beaulieu, Jeff Mutter, Linda Teel, Paul DiModica, Craig Duffy, Mark Fiorillo, Ray Salvatore

**Administration Present:** Dr. Phil Thornton, Superintendent, Robert Mitchell, Assistant Superintendent

**Agenda Item #1:** Chairperson Convenes Meeting  
Chairwoman Beaulieu convened the meeting to order at 6:31 p.m.

**Agenda Item #2:** Pledge of Allegiance

**Agenda Item #3:** Approval of Agenda  
Mr. DiModica made a motion to approve the agenda, 2<sup>nd</sup> Mrs. Teel and Mr. Mutter, approved 7-0.

**Agenda Item #4:** FY15 Budget Discussion and Vote  
Alex Prignano began by explaining the local BEP – actual expenditures and also expenses outside of the BEP such as school administrators, consultants, supplies, buildings upkeep, retirees benefits – just to name a few. FY13 was shorted \$4.3m on the BEP calculation – the town is only responsible for the non-BEP portions. Dr. Thornton reviewed what the district would need to meet the BEP – social workers (2), para-professionals (6), \$800,000 in textbooks – to get us to where we should be (includes some E books), school clerks (to help secretaries in the offices), reading interventionists (3), math interventionists (3), tech coordinator, .2 nurse for Cumberland Hill, sound system for the auditorium, elementary string program, middle school jazz band, musical equipment, chromebooks (\$600,000 for the high school), sports programs (i.e. girls hockey), restore the t.v. tel studio program at the high school, computer science – software and one teacher, bio-tech program, one tech for technology support district wide – this and a few others add up to \$4.3m very quickly Dr. Thornton noted. Other items that would be nice to have would be things like additional guidance counselors, extra library help, phys. Ed. Teacher for health, \$3.7m for the district to add one more hour to each school day, change the start times at the high school. Both Alex and Dr. Thornton noted that some of these items are one time purchases – such as the chromebooks. Mr. Fiorillo asked about Special Education needs and Dr. Thornton said that he had spoken with Dr. Colwell and that she had recommended what they needed for Special Education and that all was put into the requested budget. Dr. Colwell said that the para-professionals are specifically for SPED and that we currently meet the minimums for the district when we are looking at IEP's. She went on to say that we need the additional support in the classroom – it would help a great deal, especially at the high school. Mrs.

Beaulieu asked if there was a baseline for the redline students. Mr. Mitchell said that students are placed in intervention based on their assessments (which are periodically done) then there is a plan that is developed – they are then assessed every eight weeks. Mr. Mitchell believes that there are more redline students currently because of the Starr Assessments and the more rigorous curriculum. Mrs. Teel asked Dr. Thornton if the \$800,000 for textbooks had us in line with the common core and Dr. Thornton said that it did. When he was reviewing the book situations he tried to fill in all the holes – everyone should be able to take a book home and then of course there will be some E books. Mrs. Beaulieu asked Dr. Thornton about the t.v. tel studio and he said that all of the schools that he has been associated with have had these studios; it is a great pathway for the students. She then asked Dr. Thornton about the technology piece and Dr. Thornton said that the \$600,000 for the chromebooks is for the high school, \$51,000 for the teacher and \$5,600 for the software – the middle school chromebooks are already in the budget. Mr. Salvatore asked about the increase to the budget and Dr. Thornton said that the budget he is submitting is \$59,135,824 or a 2.7% increase over last year’s approved budget. Mr. Mutter asked if the \$4.3m would make us compliant with the BEP and Dr. Thornton said yes it would. It would be an additional 34 positions (+8 already in the budget) that would be added to all of the schools. We would have Spanish in the elementary schools at least one time a week, band during the day in the middle schools, chromebooks, project lead the way and interventionists – all great things for our schools – and if we did not have the BEP \$4.3m then we would not be able to get these things. Dr. Thornton would also like to see a drama program and more art supplies and additional art programs if he had more dollars to spend – something to think about for the future. Mr. DiModica asked how the band class would fit into the daily schedule and Dr. Thornton said that they would be looking at it and it could be a library rotation. Mr. Duffy asked Alex what the increase was to our budget over the last five years and Alex said it went from \$51.4 in 2008 to \$57.5 so it was about 10-12% or 1.9% per year. Mrs. Beaulieu asked if anyone in the audience had questions and Scott S. asked is there would be a tax increase to fund the BEP and if any cuts were made to fund the non-BEP items. Alex said that they are always trying to find ways to save money, they have done several things to reduce costs to utilities, etc, and he said that the budget is built on actual costs for next year. Scott S. commented that he thought with this increase that the taxes could go up as much as 7 or 8% and he believes that we have a town tax cap which is less than that. He also noted that the BEP is new to him because he said he did not hear that much about it during last year’s budget proceedings. Mr. Mutter asked if the \$4.3m was meeting the minimum of the BEP and then asked if Alex had met with the finance director yet. Alex said he had met with him already and he was sending the spreadsheets over to him in the morning. Mr. Mutter noted that everyone needs to trust the figures and believe that the BEP is indeed being funded. Scott S. asked again about the tax cap and where the dollars would come from. Mr. Mutter noted that there is a \$8.9m surplus that the town has and a little over \$2.0m that the school department has so actually some of the money could come from there and he also talked about a 4% levy and that we should bring the levy to the state rate and we could be compliant so as not to go over the 3% tax cap and not violate any statutes. Mrs.

Beaulieu did note that there was a lot of discussion about the BEP last year and that the BEP has always been there – she told Scott S. to check the town council minutes from last year and he would find the discussions regarding the BEP. Mrs. Beaulieu also noted that the statutes that were referred to earlier state that you cannot cut some community activities to get to be compliant in the community and this is not necessarily just for the school department. She went on to say that the right people are looking at getting this district to where it should be and to be compliant and that we are all looking to the future. Bill M. spoke next and said that the SC was doing a good job. He did say that the BEP was very confusing – asked where is the legality behind the BEP and if other schools were doing this. He said he wants the SC to look at the whole picture, not just what they need, but also what the town needs and he wanted to know what could be eliminated if need be. Mrs. Teel stated that RIDE passes regulations as to what the BEP is going to be – it is a general law 16. It is how we will get our share – we are required to comply with it – it is a law. She went on to say that it references that the SC is responsible for setting a budget to support the BEP. She explained the budget and how some things belong in the BEP and some items did not – she explained how the numbers add up into each category – again, she noted that the BEP is a law and it is what we are supposed to be doing. She said she thinks we are finally bringing forth a budget that puts us in compliance with the BEP, it is the minimum amount, but we are finally there – if we had extra dollars we could go over the BEP amount – you can go over, but you have to meet the minimum. Mrs. Teel said we have spent many years talking about this – 80% of the past increases to our budgets have gone to non-BEP items – we are trying to get those numbers down so we can use extra dollars to fund the BEP. Bill M. asked if you have the BEP amount funded, is the state giving us the amount that we are supposed to get? Mrs. Teel said the state has a plan but our community has no plan to increase the town funding figures. Bill M. said that he and some others from the town hall had gone down to the state house to testify regarding this issue, but he felt it went on deaf ears – they have not heard anyone say that this has to be done – no one has told them to do this. Mrs. Teel stated that this is clearly a law which outlines what state and locals are supposed to do – we have asked the superintendent to come up with a budget that abides by the law and this is what he is proposing. Mr. Mutter said that there has always been something that pops up, big deficits, etc., so you have to make sure you are in compliance – we always talk about working together – this is something that needs all of our attention – he said we are here now and we need to work together to get this done – we all must agree on a starting point – it is a law. Mr. Mutter went on to say that we need to stay in compliance and we should not be pointing fingers at anyone – we all worked together before and we will work together to get this done. Bill M. said that they do want to work together but that they would like to understand it better. He also said that if we do not have good schools in town then the taxpayer would lose property value. Mr. Mutter noted that the budget needs to be in the mayor's office on Monday. Kristin came to the podium and asked about the formula that the state had adopted to get us to year number four in that phase and she wondered where the shortfall from the state is. Mr. Duffy asked if the \$4.3m is consisted of some of the state shortfall and Alex said no it is all of the town shortfall. Mrs. Beaulieu then reiterated the fact that the SC

had tonight and Monday night to vote on the budget, because it was due to the mayor's office by Monday. Mr. Mutter noted that he had not heard any opinions from any of the SC members so far. Mr. Mutter said that he would make some changes to it, but he would put the budget in to be in compliance – he is not comfortable with doing it tonight, but he said that they could go with a 4% cap, amend the FY14 budget, refinance some bonds (possible \$600,000 but need more information on it), could take some dollars, if not all of it, out of surplus money – these were just some thoughts that he had that could make it work – but he said that the SC needed to present their case and then could make adjustments to reconcile – he thought that if the school department took some dollars from their surplus and the town took some dollars from their surplus, we could share the pain – half and half. He wants to get it right and stay in compliance with all statutes. Mrs. Teel said that the FM chairperson needs to bring some amendments to the meeting on Monday night, such as the refinancing of some of the school bonds. Mr. DiModica asked what would happen if Mr. Mutter didn't get all the information needed by Monday and Mr. Mutter said that the SC could still pass the budget and then amend it. Mr. Duffy noted that he struggles with all of this, he would like to do all that Dr. Thornton talked about but then he thought that maybe we could do it over 2 or 3 years – he said he is not comfortable asking for it all at once – but – he wants to be compliant with the BEP – he is a realist though and maybe the 2 or 3 years theory is better. Mr. Salvatore said that he agreed with Mr. Duffy and some of Mr. Mutter's thoughts, and he thought phasing in would be a good idea. Mr. Fiorillo asked Dr. Thornton where in the BEP it mentioned that sports is a part of the BEP and both Dr. Thornton and Alex said it is in there – they gave him a reference point to look it up. Mrs. Beaulieu said they would meet again on Monday – we need to make an informed decision for our students – they need to receive a diploma that has meaning – we need to ask a lot of questions. Mr. Duffy asked Alex how next year's budget would look if we passed this budget and Alex said that it depended on how they would fill the BEP bucket, the revenues, the shortfalls, the recurring revenues, the one time purchases, etc. Mr. Duffy asked if this was a catch-up for us or would it be about 2% each year after this and Alex said that after this year, the 4% would take care of it going forward.

**Agenda Item #5:** Adjournment

Mr. DiModica made a motion to adjourn, 2<sup>nd</sup> Mrs. Teel, approved 6-1.

Meeting was adjourned at 8:42 p.m.

Meeting minutes respectfully submitted by Linda A. Jackvony