

Finance Committee Minutes – March 21, 2022 (Via Zoom) (Recording [here](#))

Attendees: Ben Ford, Jay Moore, Jim Fenn, Rayna Bishop, Bryce Sammel, approximately 10 members of the public

1. Meeting called to order at 6:34pm. Committee Chair Ben Ford reported the resignation of Committee Member Gwen Hagenbarth, resulting in a reduction of the Committee to 4 members.
2. Agenda amended to add discussion of replacing the sewage lift system at the Middle School/High School building.
3. Business Manager Jim Fenn updated the committee on the initiative to replace the MS/HS sewage lift system. The system is currently in working condition, but is no longer being produced or supported by the manufacturer, so replacement parts are unavailable. Two years ago, the business office put out an RFP to replace the system and received only one quote- for approximately \$270k. The work did not proceed at that time due to competing priorities. In response to another RFP put out this year, the same bidder sent a quote for approximately \$370k, a difference of \$100k. Jim recommends moving forward with the work based on the contractor's availability to start in 6 months and our ability to spread the payments over two district fiscal years. Also, the new system would be capable of serving a new MS/HS building if/when its construction proceeds. Jim will work with B&G to manage the spend within budget allocations. The Committee supports the recommendation.
4. The Committee discussed the results of votes on the FY23 budget at Town Meeting. Ben reported the budget passed in every town except Bridgewater, where no votes outnumbered yes votes by about 20. The Committee also noted significantly lower participation at Town Meeting across the district, likely due to the pandemic and the Omicron variant. The Committee noted an anomaly in Woodstock, where more than 500 voters did not vote on the budget. Ben suggested this was due to a formatting issue with the Woodstock ballots making the budget item easy to overlook.

Ben also reported on the projected adoption of the results of the Pupil Weighting Study and its likely potential to result in more money from the Ed Fund being allocated to the district. Another significant aspect of this draft legislation is the suspension of "penalty phase" for an additional 5 years through FY28. Jim Fenn reported he received correspondence from the AOE indicating budgets passed by school districts around the state resulted in spending totaling \$15M more than was projected by the State, which could impact legislative decisions regarding the ed fund surplus and/or projected tax rates.

5. Jim reported on the initiative to replace our current bus contract. Following issuance of an RFP, Jim contacted 5 bussing companies. He received no responses from 2, and 2 more indicated they were not interested in submitting bids. 1 bid was received- from our current vendor, Butler Bus. Their bid represents a savings of approximately \$70k compared to our current contract. The Committee expressed disappointment with the lack of competing bids but noted there is no indication of collusion among the companies invited to bid. The Committee noted the RFP had served its purpose in having Butler Bus move away from a number of contracts dating prior to Act 46 mergers, to a consolidated contract with new price calculations. Jim Fenn recommended moving forward with a new contract based on Butler's bid. The Committee supports the recommendation.
6. The Committee reviewed options provided by Superintendent Sherry Souza to address an unanticipated influx in pre-K enrollment for the 2023-24 school year. The Committee considered the following data and recommendations:

Pre K Enrollment 2022-2023

Optimal enrollment: Cap of 16 students per prekindergarten class (keeps 2 EEE spots per class available to meet federal statute) *[WCSU Procedural Implementation of Class Size](#) Policy

Current data:

School	FY22 enrollment	FY23 enrollment	Optimal Capacity *	Current staff	# PreK 3 moving to PreK 4	New resident applications	Wait List
BA	15	17	16	1 PreK Teacher 1 PreK Para	6	11	1 WCSU resident (not Barnard)
KES	24	29	28	2 PreK Teacher 2 PreK Paras	12	17	2 out-of-district
RES	16	16	16	1 PreK/K Teacher 1 PreK/K Para	4 (8 K students)	4	1 out-of-district
WES	54	48	16 x 3	3 Pre K Teachers 4 Pre K Paras	31 & one 4 yr old remaining in PreK	16	21 residents 3 out-of-district

3 Options to address the number of PreK students waitlisted:

Options	Advantages	Disadvantages	Financial Impact
<p>Option #1</p> <p>Continue with the current PreK District class structure</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Has least financial expense to the District District receives .46 ADM per enrolled student whether private or public PreK 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 22 PreK resident students will not receive WCSU PreK program District remains responsible for Universal PreK reimbursement at \$3656 per student Does not include additional PreK students that may enter the District prior to the start of the school year 	<p>Total cost: \$3656 x 22 students = \$80,434</p> <p>Total revenue: 22 students x \$10,000* (ADM) = \$220,000</p> <p>Net revenue: Less reimbursements of \$80,434 = \$139,566</p>

<p>Option #2</p> <p>Add PreK teacher to RES and para educator to BA</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meets 13 additional PreK students needs: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Adds 8 Pre K seats to RES ○ Adds 5 PreK seats to BA • District receives .46 ADM per enrolled student whether private or public PreK 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parents would need to travel to access District PreK programs • Does not include additional PreK students that may enter the District prior to the start of the school year • Unlikely to fill RES due to location and unwillingness of families to travel (only one surveyed parent willing to travel to RES) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A teacher MA track, step 5, 2 person benefits will cost us \$78,230 • A para step 4 person benefits will cost us \$44,895 <p>Cost for staff: \$123,125</p> <p>Cost for reimbursements: \$3656 x 9 students = \$32,904</p> <p>Total costs: \$156,029</p> <p>Revenue: 22 students x \$10,000* (ADM) = \$220,000</p> <p>Net revenue: Less reimbursements & staff costs = \$63,971</p>
<p>Options #3</p> <p>Add 2 PreK teachers and 2 para educators to WES, and one para educator at BA</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meets 22 PreK student needs • Students attend school within their town of residence • Provides a higher teacher to student ratio • District receives .46 ADM per enrolled student whether private or public PreK 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does not include additional PreK students that may enter the District prior to the start of the school year • Does not allow acceptance of Universal PreK out-of-district students 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A teacher MA track, step 5, 2 person benefits will cost us \$78,230 • A para step 4 person benefits will cost us \$44,895 <p>Total Cost for staff: \$291,145</p> <p>Total cost for reimbursements: Additional Pre K enrollment past initial enrollment date ? x \$3656 = ?</p> <p>Revenue: 22 students x \$10,000* (ADM) = \$220,000</p> <p>Net revenue: Less reimbursements & staff costs = -\$71,145</p>
<p>Other options:</p>			

* Approximated .46 of ADM reimbursement

The Committee combined Public Comment with the discussion of pre-K enrollment to receive information and advisement from members of the public attending the meeting.

The Committee voted to move forward with Option #3, based on the following considerations and objectives:

- The absence of viable alternative pre-K options available to currently waitlisted students. Parents reported all Woodstock area private pre-K facilities are at capacity for next school year. With no pre-K options, many of these kids will be kept at home and some parents may opt to relocate out of the district, resulting in lost benefits of the pre-K experience and loss of revenue for the district
- Superintendent Souza's report of the benefits to students of pre-K enrollment, an early opportunity to deliver district programs and experiences. Pre-K kids participating in our programs and receiving district services are more ready to learn and require fewer support services later in their educational careers
- Investing to foster growth of the school district consistent with recent actions of the board (e.g. reopening Prosper Valley) to promote future enrollment, benefiting district programs and lowering per pupil spending, the key driver of district tax rates
- Providing equitable learning opportunities for all pre-K kids residing in the school district

Next steps will entail posting job openings for the new teachers and paras needed to expand our pre-K program, coordination with Committee members absent from the meeting, and reporting to the full School Board actions taken by the Committee.

The Committee noted these actions do not meet the current demand or further demand for pre-K services likely to increase over the next 6 months prior to the start of the school year and recognized the need to continue evaluating options for further increases to district capacity.

7. The Committee adjourned at 7:44pm.