**Board of Finance Special Meeting**

**March 8, 2023 6 PM**

**Meeting held remotely**

1. **Call to order:** Board of Finance Chair Michael Imber called the meeting to order at 6:02 pm. Also in attendance were Board of Finance members, Vice Chair Rone Baldwin, Theresa Brasco, Jeffrey Farr, Amy Gare, Jeffrey Goldstein, and Maxwell Rosenthal. Also in attendance were Weston School Superintendent Lisa Barbiero, Assistant Superintendent Dr. Tina Henckel, School Finance Director Phillip Cross, Director of Pupil Personnel Services Tracy Edwards, Hurlbutt Elementary School Principal Laura Kaddis, Intermediate School Principal Patricia Falber, Middle School Principal Daniel Doak, High School Principal Meghan Ward, Director of Digital Learning and Technology Daniel DeVito, Facilities Director Michael DelMastro, and BOE Chair Steve Ezzes.
2. **Discussion/ Decision concerning the Board of Education’s proposed budget for FY 2023-24:** Mr. Imber introduced Superintendent Lisa Barbiero who reviewed a presentation on the BOE’s proposed budget for the fiscal year 2023-2024. Superintendent Barbiero gave an overview of the BOE budget with an operating budget of $58,047,590 and a capital budget of $856,590 with a total increase of $1,656,405 or 2.94%. Mrs. Barbiero gave an explanation that utilities, salaries/benefits, enrollment projections, special education, and curriculum and instruction initiatives are the main drivers of the budget. Ms. Barbiero’s presentation detailed WPS commitment goals, comparisons of budgets to neighboring towns, enrollment projections and classroom sizes with the need for pure teams across academic areas in the 6,7,8th grade as well as BOE class size guideline and staffing.
3. Members of the Board of Finance were presented with the opportunity to ask questions on the proposed budget. Responses were given by Ms. Barbiero, Dr. Tina Henckel, Phil Cross, Tracey Edwards, Meghan Ward, Daniel Doak, Patricia Falber, Laura Kaddis, Daniel DeVito, Michael DelMastro and Steve Ezzes:

* Mr. Imber asked about premium cost shares for health insurance and how it compared to other districts. Mr. Cross responded it was relatively low compared to other towns.
* Mr. Imber asked about AFSCME current contract negotiations. Mrs. Barbiero and Mr. Cross responded.
* Mr. Imber asked about the 2.5 FTE instructional leaders . Ms. Barbiero and Dr. Henckel discussed the plan for the Instructional Coaches that are being put in place particularly for reading and math. Ms. Brasco asked what other strategies in other schools are as well as what types of coaching models, and what are ways of addressing and meeting the goals are. Ms. Barbiero noted the need to reevaluate to meet the needs of the district and revisions will be made based on student needs. Dr. Hinckel said there are many different variables to consider and you cannot compare apples to apples to other towns. Questions by BOF were asked and answered regarding stipends and consulting services as well as the FTE’s.
* Mr. Imber asked for clarification on the reading program expense for K-2 and what portion is recurring and if it is a permanent increase for the reading program . Dr. Henckel answered that it is a one year implementation cost for K-2 and for grades 3-5 for the following year for and then after that it is sustainable.
* Mr. Imber asked for clarification on a decreases in line items of $136,000 decrease in field costs. Mr. Cross said that is for a third party to maintain our fields. WPS are moving forward to eliminate the 3rd party and going back to in house.
* A discussion was held on tuitions and settlements as well as transportation costs, noting that there is a decrease in out of district tuitions and a decrease in tuition supplements. Ms. Edwards wanted to highlight the complexity of budgeting in these areas as they depend on individual students. The district is seeing an increase in out of district placement students resulting in transportation increases. Placements vary in costs so that is why there difference and decrease. In terms of tuition settlements the decrease is attributed to changes in student needs and students exiting the district. These numbers are based on student needs at the time of developing the budget.
* Mr. Imber asked why there was a security decline in the proposed budget. Mrs. Barbiero discussed that this was the result of paying off of a security lease. That is why there is a savings.
* BOF asked why athletic bus transportation has increased 62%. Mr. Cross explained this is based on a widespread driver shortage therefore requiring utilization of a 3rd party.
* Mr. Imber lead a capital budget discussion regarding paving costs and the differentiation from last year’s budgeted amount for paving which was deferred to this year and has since seen a decrease. Mr. Cross explained that last year’s capital budgeted amount has decreased due to soft costs estimates. Mr. Imber also asked about capital requests. Mr. DelMastro discussed some of the larger consulting projects for the North House HVAC and future projects. Mr. Baldwin said the projects are tracking very closely to what was requested last year and are very consistent.

Other questions and discussions followed by Mr. Baldwin regarding health insurance plan budgeted costs as well as FTE’s and grants allocated and supplemented. Discussions continued with Mr. Cross and Ms. Barbiero discussing health insurance cost plans and estimates and the BOF will follow up with future discussions.

Mr. Baldwin had questions regarding open choice enrollments inquiring how the BOE gets funded from the state for open choice students. Ms. Barbiero gave an explanation of how open choice works and the commitment to educate the students K-12. Mr. Cross discussed funding for open choice, the state gives approximately $3,000 per student.

Discussions continued with Mr. Cross answering questions from Mr. Baldwin regarding consulting services and other pupil services. Mr. Cross discussed the cost is driven by the new initiatives that Dr. Henckel reviewed with the BOF.

Mr. Baldwin asked about the transportation costs and contract renewal dates. Mr. Cross explained that there is not a significant increase in regular transportation based on the fleet reduction. Mr. Baldwin asked about equipment cost increases. Mr. Cross explained that it was due to the multi-year replacement cycle for technology equipment upgrades. Mr. DeVito discussed the replacement technology plans; 2nd grade chrome books, K Ipads, wireless access as well as lease options vs. purchasing costs of equipment.

Mr. Baldwin discussed the procurement policy for the BOE. Ms. Barbiero and Mr. Cross explained the current procurement policy in place and bidding process through the finance department and the district policy.

Ms. Gare asked about the budgeting for mental health services as there was a cost savings in the budget request. Ms. Edwards discussed the reallocation of staffing to meet the needs in PPS/SPED. Reallocating Assistant Director positions has lead to a more effective way to meet the staffing needs.

Each Principal then spoke to the importance of a fiscally responsible budget, class sizes being important to have balanced classes.

Mr. Farr asked about Mr. DeVito about purchasing vs. subscription programs. Mr. DeVito said that the majority are subscription based models , most software are yearly fees, not outright purchases. Mr. DeVito discussed that constant evaluations are being reviewed to see if we have overlap or need certain subscriptions. Dr. Henckel and Mr. DeVito consistently look at ways to condense and consolidate. They also look at multiple year subscriptions as well as negotiate for multi-year discounts to reduce costs.

Mr. Farr also discussed the budget request for a track replacement for $300,000. Mr. Cross noted that the last 4 years funds have been put aside for track replacement. Mr. DelMastro said that in 2019 the quote was $300,000 to recoat it with the possibility to redo the asphalt. Currently the entire asphalt needs to be replaced. The shared contribution amount is $300,000 from the town and 300,000 from the schools.

Mr. Rosenthal had comments on the 8 sections of classroom guidelines and the needs of the students and measuring success. He was in agreement with Ms. Gare on mental health and feels that this should be looked at for next year. Ms. Barbiero reiterated her commitment to mental health and how the structures of the teams and Assistant Directors will all be a benefit.

Ms. Brasco had questions relating to classroom size guidelines and provided historical content of classroom projections for the past 6 years. Questions and answers followed regarding classroom size projections and demographer projections. Ms. Brasco discussed the challenge for budgeting purposes noting that budget enrollment projections have exceeded actual enrollments and should be considered.

In conclusion Mr. Imber discussed that the BOF is reviewing incremental investments in education. The BOF will listen to public comment at the public hearing on March 28th and will deliberate on March 30th and will have continuing discussions with Ms. Barbiero and Mr. to understand what the metrics are and benchmarks and academic return on investments.

1. **Adjournment:** Mr. Imber asked for a motion to adjourn the meeting. Mr. Baldwin made the motion to adjourn. Ms. Gare seconded. The motion passed unanimously. Meeting adjourned at 9:30 pm.

Minutes Submitted By: Shawn Amato, Recording Secretary