

**Budget Subcommittee Meeting Minutes
March 29, 2023**

Present: Ms. Lynn Cavicchi, Ms. Jennifer Walsh, Mr. Frank DelVecchio, Ms. Diana Bren, Ms. Sara Walsh, and Walter Wilk

RECEIVED
TOWN CLERKS OFFICE

Also Present: Mr. Kevin Dumas, Mr. Barry LaCasse, Ms. Teresa Murphy and Mr. Ed Donoghue

Select Board: Mr. Michael Trowbridge, Mr. Neil Rhein, Mr. Jess Aptowitz, Mr. Frank DelVecchio and Ms. Diana Bren

MAY 11 2023
MASSACHUSETTS

Finance Committee: Ms. Sara Walsh, Mr. Scott Feely, Mr. Walter Wilk, Mr. Jack Cooney and Ms. Greta Thurston (Ms. Thurston was not present at the start of the meeting but arrived at 6:20PM)

School Committee: Ms. Lauren Scher, Ms. Kiera O'Neil, Ms. Lynn Cavicchi and Ms. Jenn Walsh

1. Open Meeting

Ms. Sara Walsh called the Budget Subcommittee meeting to order at 6:06PM with all six members present.

Mr. Michael Trowbridge called the Select Board meeting to order at 6:06PM with all five members present.

Ms. Sara Walsh called the Finance Committee meeting to order at 6:06PM with four members present.

Ms. Kiera O'Neil called the School Committee meeting to order at 6:06PM with four members present.

2. Review of FY 24 Budget Presentations and Current Status of Budget

Ms. Sara Walsh welcomed all those present. She provided a summary of the budget process this year and noted that it began back in August. She stated there was an initial shortfall of 5 million and now the budget is balanced. Mr. LaCasse stated that it's important to note that this process started in August and it was known that it was going to be a difficult budget year. He stated that the budget does meet the goals of maintaining level services for the residents and staying within the means of proposition two and a half. Mr. LaCasse then went through an overview of the budget including the budget assumptions and overall the fiscal year 2024 budget is 2.97 percent increase over fiscal year 2023. Mr. LaCasse then reviewed the expenses by major cost centers.

Ms. Sara Walsh asked if any committee members had any questions and Mr. Wilk asked Mr. LaCasse if he had created a preliminary fiscal year 2025 budget so that the committee could see what next years budget would look like. Mr. LaCasse responded that he had completed a quick model and overall it created a \$228,000 shortfall. The Committee members discussed the electric costs and Mr. Jess Aptowitz as Chair of the Light Commissioners stated that the General Manager and Consultant are looking at the rates and expect to possibly have answers for the Light Commissioners meeting on April 10th.

Mr. Donoghue then gave a presentation on the Schools budget. He stated that the biggest cost drivers were contractual obligations, special education costs and increased energy costs. Mr. Donoghue stated that there is some savings because there is not a large text book purchase and there was savings in wages from retirees and attrition. There were however going to be reductions to staff. He stated that the reductions to staff would not be at Roland Green because the enrollment numbers are increasing at that school, however the other schools have declining enrollment numbers. He provided an example that at the elementary level if the class size is currently 23 students and if a teacher in a grade was lost it may only cause the class size to go up by one or two students, but there would not be big changes to class sizes. Ms. Murphy then provided

additional comments about staffing. She stated that it is all enrollment management and noted that in fiscal year 2013 there were 1,000 more students in the district and it has been a gradual decline at most of the grades. She stated that positions are being reduced and that it is not just teachers and it is across all schools and not just one school so the impact will not be drastic but she was not sure exactly what the impact would be. She stated that her and her staff are being careful and taking time to analyze and the impact will be manageable and she was comfortable bringing this proposal forward. Mr. Donoghue then summarized what expenses are being covered by grants and how those are shifting to the operating budget.

3. Scheduling Next Steps

Mr. LaCasse stated that he would like to see another Tri-Board in early April for all Boards to take a vote of support together on the FY24 budget. Ms. O'Neil stated that the vote on the budget from the School Committee will be on their April 11th agenda. Mr. Trowbridge stated that the Select Board will have members missing on their next meeting on April 5th and stated it would need to be April 12th. Ms. Sara Walsh stated that the Finance Committee was not meeting until April 27th because of school vacation. The group agreed that each Board can vote at their individual meetings the week of April 10th and another Tri-Board meeting was not necessary. Mr. LaCasse stated that he would update all the Boards of any changes to the budget and if there were additional money he would look to reduce the use of the health care stabilization fund and increase free cash. Mr. Dumas then noted that the May 3rd Select Board meeting will be for a budget public hearing.

4. Questions from Community

There was no one present virtually that wanted to ask questions or state comments. Ms. Sara Walsh then invited members present in the person to come forward to the microphone to ask questions or comment.

Ms. Alma Jeri-Wahrhaftig of 194 Mill Street came forward and commented that she is concerned about the loss of eleven positions and asked how that would be manageable. She stated that as a high school teacher in Franklin when one teacher is lost it means class sizes go from twenty-five to thirty students, it means less AP classes and it means less one on one support to students with needs. She ended by stating "Let's do it for the kids and not short change them." Ms. Murphy appreciated what was stated but believed that in Mansfield things were different from where she was teaching and believes the situation is manageable and is not increasing class size to thirty and believed it was time to make reductions to Mansfield schools.

Ms. Dana Hourigan of 15 Evans Circle stated that she appreciated all the work done by everyone and based on the stories from the schools, the effects of COVID, bullying, distressing stories on social media by parents, increased stress, depression and anxiety she did not believe this was the year for reductions to school staff. Ms. Murphy commented that she is sorry those messages are out on social media and she feels Mansfield Schools are a great place to be. She added that society has changed and there are caring staff and support resources and they have sought to have volunteers to help monitor the bathrooms for students that are vaping. Ms. Murphy stated that the Roland Green school will not be affected by a reduction in staff but the other schools will be. She then reiterated that she was confident in the analysis that has been done and they have seen improvements and growth in students since COVID.

Ms. Jean Southard of 15 Old Elm Street stated that she has appreciated what has been said but would like to have further comment on what the impact will be at the schools with a reduction in staff. Ms. Murphy responded that she did not want to be specific because it is people's lives and they should be the first to know. She then provided the example that it could be a class size going from fourteen students in a classroom to seventeen or eighteen students.

Mr. Steve Schoonveld of 21 Newton Street came forward and stated that he would like to express the thoughts of Ms. Murphy, Mr. Donoghue and the staff. He stated that he served on the equity task force the past few months but he does not think that the decisions are going to be made without equity in mind. He stated that equity is making sure that every student has the opportunity to be the best that they can be when they are done with high school.

5. Any Items Not Known within 48 Hours

There were no items.

6. Adjourn

Motion: To adjourn the School Committee meeting of March 29, 2023 at 7:07PM. (Cavicchi/J. Walsh)

Passes 4:0

Motion: To adjourn the Select Board meeting of March 29, 2023 at 7:07PM. (Aptowitz/Bren)

Passes 5:0

Motion: To adjourn the Finance Committee meeting of March 29, 2023 at 7:07PM. (Feely/Wilk)

Passes 5:0

Motion: To adjourn the Budget Subcommittee meeting of March 29, 2023 at 7:07PM. (Bren/DelVecchio)

Passes 6:0

Signature

Date

4/26/23

Minutes prepared by Carrie Champagne