

**The Hamilton Wenham Regional
School Committee Meeting
Wednesday, January 31, 2018 7:30 pm
Buker School Multipurpose Room**

Present:

David Polito
Jeanise Bertrand
Joshua Liebow, Chair
Gene Lee
Michelle Bailey

Also Present:

Michael Harvey, Superintendent
Jeff Sands, Assistant to the Superintendent
James Goudie, Student Government Representative

1) Call to Order

Joshua Liebow calls the meeting to order at 7:31pm.

2) Pledge of Allegiance

3) Citizens' Comments

The floor is opened to citizens' comments, with Michelle Bailey agreeing to enforce the 3-minute time limit per comment/citizen.

Patrick Waddell, 5 Great Pond Road, Wenham: Comment about athletic complex. Has reviewed the packet from last week's meeting and was surprised to find the athletic complex listed as a debt exclusion. Also surprised to receive fundraising email from the Little League last night. With a $\frac{2}{3}$ majority vote needed at town meeting, the turf field is going to be a tight vote as it is a controversial issue. Claims that bringing this before the town will be undermining fundraising efforts. Believe that they have naming rights for about \$600,000. The committee has not approached the CPCs, where there is money available, and encourages committee to do so. States that the committee is proposing a project too early and the CPC cycles have already ended for this year. Questions why district is considering using up all the debt when the schools are getting older, committee is proposing a 20 year bond, and school will need capital improvement. I implore you: do not put the athletic field before town meeting.

Jenn Flynn, Miles River Road, Hamilton: Comment in response to user fees. Reviewed the budget and did not see insurance. Is there insurance for athletes and coaches?

Jeff Sands clarifies there is insurance, but is found within the general district insurance. This covers general liability, property, and a variety of other coverage to include the athletic programs.

Jenn Flynn: I think everyone wants the user fees lowered, but the question is how do we lower the fees, and where does that money come from?

Josh Liebow: We are on level service with our budgets. As a result, one of the only ways to lower user fees would be to increase taxes.

Jenn Flynn: Talks about scholarships and thinks the lack of participation could be explained by families unable to write large checks, especially right before Christmas.

Joshua Liebow points out that 80% participation in sports is high.

Lori Bouchard, 202 Moulton Street, Hamilton: Comment regarding athletic user fees. Has 3 children in the district, and agrees with Jenn Flynn about the high user fees. Has conducted research on neighboring districts and Hamilton/Wenham appears to be the highest in the Cape Ann League. Other towns break out level of service for teams (freshmen teams don't have the same benefits and therefore makes sense for them to have different, lower fees). Would also like the committee to consider payment plans, as well as reconsidering the third sport given for free. Finally, her understanding is that girls' basketball is higher than boys' and would like to see the user fees equitable.

Jeremy Coffey, 45 Kimball Road, Wenham: Comment regarding athletic user fees. Has 4 kids in the district. Would like us to challenge the narrative around the way we look at and talk about sports. Instead of being viewed as an adjunct activity, sports should be valued as an integral part of our educational system. Participation in sports has a number of positive correlations such as weight control, increased self-esteem, problem solving skills, social confidence, and academic success. Participation in sports also results in a number of negative correlations to include lower rates of juvenile arrest, violent behavior, substance abuse, and dropping out of school. There is much more at stake than simply a game. We need to make sure we are giving all students, especially girls, every opportunity to succeed. Girls who play sports have better body image, higher social and academic success, lower rates of risky behaviors, lower rates of addiction, anxiety, suicide, and self-destructive behaviors. We are pushing a lot to the side when we make participation in sports cost prohibitive. The 74% participation rate is misrepresentative because the formula does not take into account the students who play only one season and cannot afford involvement in others. Points out other complexities that influence participation rates, and why the committee should prioritize lowering the user fees. Commends school committee members for their hard work, and asks for careful consideration to make sports more accessible.

[applause from citizens]

Mora McHugh, Wenham: Comment about athletic user fees. Lifelong resident of Wenham. Believes sports offer so much: competition, teammanship, how to work together as a team, and

accountability. These are all transferable skills and would urge the school committee to make sports more of a priority and finding some way to lower fees.

Sherry Leonard, Lake Drive, Wenham: Agrees with the comments of others. Has 2 boys and it will probably cost about \$1,800 to enroll them in two seasons of sports this year. Would like the school committee to consider that a family's entire budget for extracurricular activities is expended on athletics because the user fees are so high. Students may not enroll in sports because of the fees, but they also may not enroll in arts, drama, and other extracurricular activities if their entire budget goes towards the disproportionate fees.

Peter Schibli, 188 Main St, Wenham: Appreciates the thoughtful comments this evening. Would like to point out that community attendance at these meetings is historically low. The same goes for sports. There is nothing better than seeing the outpouring of community support with youth sports. The athletic program is no more important than music and the arts, but it is certainly as important. We need to protect the program.

Stacey Burridge, Hamilton: Agrees with Sherry's comment, as she also struggles to agree to other activities that cost money. The DECA competition combined with sports and other extracurricular activities becomes too heavy a financial burden and it is frustrating to have to say no to her daughter.

Lori Bouchard: Would like to point out additional issues with regard to user fees. In addition to the high user fees, parents of students are also required to sell raffle tickets and participate in additional fundraising activities as boosters. Parents are told this fundraising will decrease user fees associated with sports involvement. This is certainly a significant burden on the parent, and it is unclear if these activities actually decrease user fees. Doesn't know the solution but something needs to be done.

Carl Norden, Topsfield Road, Wenham: Thanks community for comments so far and believe that the committee agrees with the importance of sports. Would like to underscore Jeremy's comments about sports being more necessary as it is currently designed. Also researched neighboring towns' user fees, and most seem to have tiered programs with costs around \$300-\$400. Points out that football costs are projected to be \$50,000, with \$40,000 paid for by families and only \$10,000 by the school. This doesn't seem right. Urges the school committee to consider the competing priorities in the budget, and find room for prioritizing this issue.

Suzanne Courtney, Hamilton: I recently found out we have the highest user fees in all of Cape Anne. With such high fees, I would expect higher quality uniforms and resources when participating. Freshmen soccer in particular was frustrating because the uniforms didn't match, parents were fundraising, team dinners were paid for by parents, and soccer balls and other equipment was missing and thus supplied by the parents. Also has concerns about safety: soccer team was visiting an away game on a 90 degree day and had no water on the bus because the football team had the water cooler. With the highest user fees in the area, water coolers and equipment should be expected.

Jim Moynihan, Rust Street, Hamilton: Appreciates opportunity to be heard. Also has children in the district and the high user fees factor into whether his children participate or not. Points out that the high cost could exclude students who would otherwise participate but are not necessarily star athletes with sports as their only passion. Please consider lowering fees. Thank you.

4) Chair's Report

Joshua Liebow thanks the community members for their attendance and thoughtful comments. Encourages public to regularly attend meetings and to consider the 2 open seats on the school committee for 3-year terms.

Michelle Bailey states that there is a public hearing coming up on 02/13/18 regarding the FY19 Budget. The school committee is set to vote on this night.

5) Superintendent's Report

- Michael Harvey attended the 01/25/18 presentation with state auditor Suzanne Bunk in Triton. Many recommendations were made for future legislation relative to regional schools, including: reimbursing regional transportation costs, piloting alternative to the enrollment based funding structure, streamlining the regional budget adoption process, and encouraging the expansion of district regionalization. Attendees expressed support of implementing recommendations for revising current formula to determine Chapter 70 state aid.
 - Michelle Bailey, also attended the meeting, and added that the presentation was political in nature. Brad Hill had stated that he introduced a bill to raise the school choice reimbursement rate. Michelle could not find this bill, but would like the committee to find a way to encourage this endeavor. The presentation also recommended a regular 5-year review of regional agreements, which may become a mandate in the future.
 - *Jenn Flynn* asks about the budget process Committee members, Jeff Sands, and Michael Harvey clarify the process.
- Hamilton/Wenham Joint Finance Committee meeting will be next week, 02/07/2018 at 7:00 pm (tentative) to discuss FY19 budget.

6) Consent Agenda

- a) Warrants
 - January 17, 2018 Exhibit A
- b) Minutes
 - January 17, 2018 Exhibit B
- c) Waiver for 8th grade Spring Athletics Exhibit C
 - Boys Lacrosse
 - Girls Lacrosse
 - Softball

I MOVE THAT THE HAMILTON-WENHAM REGIONAL SCHOOL COMMITTEE ACCEPT THE CONSENT AGENDA AS WRITTEN.

MOTION by David Polito; SECONDED by Jeanise Bertrand.

Michelle Bailey requests to pull Waiver from the motion.

I MOVE THAT THE HAMILTON-WENHAM REGIONAL SCHOOL COMMITTEE ACCEPT THE CONSENT AGENDA ITEMS: WARRANTS FROM 01/17/18 AND MINUTES FROM 01/17/18 AS WRITTEN.

**MOTION BY David Polito, SECONDED by Gene Lee.
Unanimously approved by 5 members present.**

Michelle Bailey discusses the potential harms of middle school students attending the number of games and practices required in High School sports. Also has concerns about the size difference of athletes as a potential safety issue.

Committee members discuss the needs of 8th grade students filling positions in high school teams as well as additional implications of this Waiver.

Gene Lee inquires about the number of participants needed for the lacrosse team.

Abby Shible, 188 Main St, Wenham: (incoming lacrosse team coach and attending the meeting) Informs public and committee about desire to build a sustainable lacrosse program to include increasing interest in the sport beginning in the 8th grade. Currently 30-34 girls are signed up.

I MOVE THAT THE HAMILTON-WENHAM REGIONAL SCHOOL COMMITTEE ACCEPT THE SPRING ATHLETICS WAIVER FOR 8th GRADE BOYS & GIRLS LACROSSE & 8th GRADE SOFTBALL.

**MOTION by David Polito, SECONDED by Jeanise Bertrand.
Approved by Jeanise Bertrand, David Polito, Josh Liebow;
Opposed by Gene Lee and Michelle Bailey.**

MOTION PASSES by majority vote.

7) New Business

- Vote on Participation in the School Choice Program for 2018-2019

I MOVE THAT THE HAMILTON-WENHAM REGIONAL SCHOOL COMMITTEE VOTE TO APPROVE PARTICIPATION IN THE SCHOOL CHOICE PROGRAM 2018/2019 FOR GRADES 9-12.

MOTION by David Polito, SECONDED by Jeanise Bertrand

Michelle Bailey: Points to enrollment numbers, stating that smaller classes in middle school did not result in staffing cuts. As a result, there are essentially empty seats in classes. Would like to discuss the opportunity to open the school choice program to middle school classes.

Joshua Liebow supports the school choice program expanding to middle school. The decline in enrollment is detrimental to the district.

Michelle Bailey states there is an opportunity to add at least 10 students. The teachers that taught a larger number last year currently have capacity to manage a larger class with the addition of school choice students. Enrolling at a lower level means the district is making a longer term commitment to that student.

Discussion amongst committee members regarding commitment to choice students, retention rates, drop-out rates in 8th - 9th grade students, pros and cons of opening up school choice to middle school, etc. Committee members outline the benefits of opening up the school choice program to the lower grades for a 1 year duration, as school choice is an annual vote.

Jeff Sands opines that opening school choice to lower grades makes operational and financial sense, as long as careful consideration is given to number enrolled.

I MOVE THAT THE HAMILTON WENHAM REGIONAL SCHOOL COMMITTEE AMEND THE CURRENT MOTION TO OPEN UP SCHOOL CHOICE IN GRADE 6, 7, & 8.

**MOTION by Michelle Bailey; SECONDED by Jeanise Bertrand.
Unanimously approved by 5 members present.**

[Original Motion] **I MOVE THAT THE HAMILTON-WENHAM REGIONAL SCHOOL COMMITTEE VOTE TO APPROVE PARTICIPATION IN THE SCHOOL CHOICE PROGRAM 2018/2019 FOR GRADES 9-12.**

**MOTION by David Polito; SECONDED by Jeanise Bertrand.
Unanimously approved by 5 members present.**

- FY19 Budget Review

Exhibit D

Unfortunately, the screen projector at meeting is not working, however viewers from home can access the slideshow document from the Hamilton Wenham School District website under school committee/ minutes & handouts

(http://www.hwschools.net/uploaded/District/school_committee/regular_meetings/packets/1.31.18_SC_Packet.pdf)

Jeff Sands provides review of FY19 Budget proposal to include definition and practice of *level-service*; level service & critical priorities overview; summary of critical priorities and implications on budget (above the level service costs); and review of FY19 District Totals.

Michelle Bailey asks for an additional slide explaining the numbers so those reading at home have a better understanding of the purpose.

Jeff Sands: Will provide additional slide. Last week's budget workshop covered athletics, maintenance/custodial/grounds, technology. Tonight's presentation will cover the review of leadership team request list, capital plan, changes to budget, and discussion regarding debt exclusion.

1. Review Leadership Team Request List

Administration asked staff to identify priorities aligning in 4 categories. Administration built the level service budget, and then reviewed leadership's requests (attached in handout) to decide which were critical top priorities that aligned with district's strategic blueprint. Jeff Sands reviews items from the list that were not chosen as part of FY19 critical priority list including staffing for technological classes, material in support of electives, staffing, etc.

Discussion regarding preschool tuition, overall budget and incorporation of 1.0 and .7 FTE staff for preschool. Discussion continues regarding importance of all items on list.

Jeff Sands underscores that administration's recommendation is what was determined for the school committee to consider. However, the school committee has final say and can deliberate and vote on a revised budget based on their priorities of the items on the list.

2. Capital Plan Approach to relative to timing of debt exclusions

Jeff Sands provides an overview of the Capital Improvement Plan as recommended by administration. Goal is to minimize incremental increases and address the longer term capital needs of the district.

Projects to be funded in FY19 Operating Budget include:

- Winthrop Sprinkler Project;
- Athletic Field Complex;
- Safety, Accessibility, and critical infrastructure

Administration's recommendation includes 5 areas:

1. Fund \$129,000 in FY19 capital projects;
2. Propose \$1 million Winthrop Sprinkler Project debt exclusion at April 2018 Annual Town Meeting;
3. Propose \$3.6 million Turf Field Complex Project debt exclusion at April 2018 Annual Town Meeting;
4. Propose \$2.6 million debt exclusion for Safety, Accessibility, and Critical Infrastructure projects as outlined in 5-year plan at April 2018 Annual Town Meeting;
5. Provide funding for any remaining new projects on 5-year plan through the operating budgets FY20- FY23 at \$350,000 per year.

Discussion regarding intentionally accelerated projects and consideration of expenses year-by-year. Jeff Sands provides copy of the updated 5-year Capital Plan, calendarized with the 5 elements listed above.

Josh Libeow supports the Turf Field Project, but the community clearly does not. This lack of support is confusing and frustrating and has negative consequences for the committee.

Jeanise Bertrand points out that community members are trying to fundraise and as a debt exclusion, the Turf Field will be difficult to fundraise for.

Discussion regarding priorities, issues with community support, technological needs (new servers), and the consequences of pushing the Turf Field Project back.

Pushing the Turf Field Project to next year will not delay the project by just one year; it will end up being pushed out a few years. If district undertakes the capital safety projects (of which there are many) in place of the Turf Field project this year, these projects will take many years to complete and prevent the Turf Field project from beginning next year. Switching (4) Safety Accessibility and Critical Infrastructure with the (3) Turf Field Complex is not a simple switch and will bring up many issues.

Michael Harvey points out that if the Turf Field is approved this year, it would still take an additional 14 months before putting the shovel in the ground.

Josh Liebow reiterates his frustration surrounding the misinformation throughout the community and the skewing of the public's perception of this project.

Jeff Sands adds that 1 year from now, we will likely not have the resources or capacity to do all these projects simultaneously.

David Polito brings up that much of the public has misconceptions, namely that getting rid of the Turf Field project would reduce the budget. This is false.

Gene Lee asks about the procedure of putting the project on town meeting.

Discussion regarding private fundraising group. Their plan was to present to the school committee on the 02/13/18 meeting. Michelle Bailey points out that this group has not obtained non-profit status, and as a result they cannot begin fundraising.

Committee members discuss strategy in light of the surprising lack of support from the community. Members express their collective concerns and frustrations with this project being held back due to public's misinformation and false perceptions.

Discussion regarding process of budget, override, Town of Wenham, difference between override and debt exclusion, school committee members' role and participation in ballot voting and advertising/advocating.

Michael Harvey clarifies that school committee members can make recommendations and vote for the budget at town meeting. Members cannot reference a ballot question, but they can make recommendations to the community and use district resources.

Discussion regarding capital plans, removal of the Turf Field project, separate phases, comparison to the town pool project, and the possible changing priorities with the next school

committee. Discussion continues regarding administration's needed guidance and vote for capital improvement plan changes. Further discussion surrounding language of motion and what the vote is allowing. Josh says he would argue that the motion include (1) Fund \$129,000 in projects in the FY19 Operating Budget, (2) Propose a \$1 million Winthrop Sprinkler Project Debt Exclusion at April 2018 Annual Town Meeting, and 4, Jeanise said she would second. Michelle says that would result as the 2 debt exclusions.

I MOVE THAT THE HAMILTON-WENHAM REGIONAL SCHOOL COMMITTEE AUTHORIZE THE LEADERSHIP TEAM TO PREPARE THE LANGUAGE TO AUTHORIZE DEBT ON THE \$1.0 MILLION WINTHROP SPRINKLER PROJECT, THE \$2.6 MILLION DEBT EXCLUSION FOR SAFETY, ACCESSIBILITY, AND CRITICAL INFRASTRUCTURE PROJECTS FOR CONSIDERATION FOR VOTE AT THE FEBRUARY 13TH SCHOOL COMMITTEE MEETING.

**MOTION by David Polito; SECONDED by Jeanise Bertrand.
Unanimously approved by 5 members present.**

3. Changes to Superintendent's Recommended Budget

Josh Liebow details his commitment to the school district, the community, and the public school system at large. Believes administration has done a superb job determining priorities and budgeting for level service. Feels strongly about cutting athletic user fees, and many of the comments this evening hit home. As a member of the school committee, Josh feels he needs to find ways to subsidize the user fees. States it is an absolute injustice that the Hamilton/Wenham logo is on team uniforms when parents are clearly the ones paying for the uniforms and more. Is fully aware of and supports a marginally higher budget to subsidize these user fees.

David Polito agrees. Would support a suggestion made last week to scale reduction over a few years. Believes this should be done to bring fees down to be comparable with others in the Cape Ann districts.

Michelle Bailey: States that overrides are an opportunity to address deficits. Michelle was personally affected by what Ms. Leonard said about not being able to participate in DECA due to the costs of sports. The current requirement for parents to fundraise is not acceptable. Shares concern about uniforms having Hamilton/Wenham logo when parents are buying them. A new system needs to be determined, and an override to address these issues is absolutely necessary.

Committee members discuss sports as motivation for community members to participate in meetings and become involved in other ways.

Jeff Sands asks the committee to determine the actual percentage rate for reduction to determine what is added to the operational budget.

School committee discusses fees, restructuring of boosters program, required fundraising, uniforms, tiered sports program, and additional considerations. Detailed discussion surrounding percentage reduction and dollar amount increase to operating budget.

Michelle Bailey brings up the point made this evening of removing the option for free third sport.

Josh Liebow states he would move to cut the user fees in half and add \$177,000 to the district operating budget.

School committee members discuss cutting the user fees by 50% including the override, dollar increase in budget, responsibility to town members, citizen participation, etc.

Jeff Sands states that administration does not necessarily need a vote, but does need direction in order to prepare for the 02/13/18 meeting. Asks if there is consensus.

With response from committee members, Jeff Sands will be adding the reduction as an Incremental Critical Priority.

Further discussion regarding override, Wenham's Board of Selectmen involvement in writing language for override, ballot structure, and the ongoing difficulties in communication.

Michelle Bailey asks administration for copies of the communication with Wenham Board of Selectmen. Michael Harvey agrees to share information after the meeting with Peter Lombardi on Monday, as to avoid spreading misinformation. Will also discuss further at next week's joint meeting. Jeff Sands agrees to summarize information after meeting to provide this to school committee.

Jeff Sands asks if there are other suggested changes to the FY19 Budget Proposal that committee members would like to talk about.

David Polito expresses his gratitude for the school committee's hard work to avoid override. He is proud of the committee and finding a solution to a long-standing issue.

Move forward with level service, critical priorities and user fees.

No other suggested changes from school committee members.

4. Authorization of Debt Discussion

(Discussed above).

- Scholarship: Institution for Savings, \$15,000 annually

Exhibit F

Discussion regarding gratitude for the Institution for Savings giving back to the community and the many benefits for the one student to receive this scholarship.

I MOVE THAT THE HAMILTON-WENHAM REGIONAL SCHOOL COMMITTEE ACCEPT THE SCHOLARSHIP IN THE AMOUNT OF \$15,000 FROM THE INSTITUTION FOR SAVINGS.

**MOTION by Jeanise Bertrand; SECONDED by David Polito.
Unanimously approved by 5 members present.**

- Donations -Grants

1. FOTA \$1,376.84 for a Cyclorama Curtain for the Ferrini Auditorium
2. FOTA \$400.00 to support the Ukulele Melee at the Cutler School

I MOVE THAT THE HAMILTON-WENHAM REGIONAL SCHOOL COMMITTEE MEETING ACCEPT THE DONATIONS FROM FOTA IN THE AMOUNT OF \$1,376.84 FOR A CYCLORAMA CURTAIN IN THE FERRINI AUDITORIUM, AND IN THE AMOUNT OF \$400 TO SUPPORT THE UKULELE MELEE AT CUTLER SCHOOL.

**MOTION by David Polito, SECONDED by Michelle Bailey.
Unanimously approved by 5 members present.**

8) Other

Topics for next meeting:

02/07/18 at 7:00pm: Joint Finance Committee Meeting to include Hamilton and Wenham FinComs, Boards of Selectmen, and School District.

02/13/2018: Next regular school committee meeting to address:

1. Budget review;
2. Budget public hearing;
3. Budget adoption;
4. Debt authorization;
5. Turf Field group

Student Government to visit on the 28th meeting.

Warrant subcommittee will be held on 02/14/18. Michelle Bailey, David Polito, and Josh Liebow agree to meet at 4:30pm on 02/14/18. Jeff Sands will take appropriate actions to facilitate the change to the regularly scheduled meeting time of 6:30 pm.

9) Vote to Adjourn

I MOVE THAT THE HAMILTON-WENHAM REGIONAL SCHOOL COMMITTEE MEETING ADJOURN AT 10:05 PM.

**MOTION by David Polito; SECONDED by Jeanise Bertrand.
Unanimously approved by 5 members present.**

Respectfully submitted Mahala Lettvin