

**Hamilton-Wenham Regional School District Committee**

**Feb. 6, 2014**

**Minutes**

**CALL TO ORDER AND  
PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE:**

Roger Kuebel opened the meeting at 7:05 p.m. in the Buker Multipurpose Room. The Committee and others present rose for the Pledge of Allegiance.

**PRESENT:**

Jeanise Bertrand, Sean Condon, Bill Dery, Deb Evans, Roger Kuebel (chair), Barbara Lawrence, Sheila MacDonald, Larry Swartz, Bill Wilson

**ALSO PRESENT:**

Dr. Michael Harvey, Superintendent; Dr. Celeste Bowler, Assistant Superintendent for Learning; Jeff Sands, Assistant Superintendent for Finance & Administration

**ABSENT:**

No one

**CITIZENS' CONCERNS:**

None

**CHAIR'S REPORT:**

R. Kuebel reported that a scheduled meeting between district representatives and the Towns' finance committees was snowed out, and is rescheduled for February 12. He recapped a proposal by one of the town clerks to change the School Committee nomination process by having the clerks, not a district employee as is currently the case, verify signatures on nomination papers; he said he would seek more information about the sponsor's rationale. He said the Feb. 13 agenda would include discussion of whether to change the size of the Committee.

**SUPERINTENDENT'S REPORT:**

Boston Globe Scholastic Art Awards

Dr. Harvey announced that high school and middle school students received a total of 4 gold and 8 silver key awards and 12 honorable mentions in the 2014 Boston Globe Scholastic Art Awards. Images of their winning artworks are posted at [hwfinearts.blogspot.com](http://hwfinearts.blogspot.com).

**CONSENT AGENDA:**

Minutes of January 30, 2014

**BILL WILSON MADE A MOTION THAT THE HW REGIONAL SCHOOL COMMITTEE VOTE TO APPROVE ALL OF THE REMAINING ITEMS ON THE CONSENT AGENDA. THERE CAN BE NO FURTHER DISCUSSION OR AMENDMENT OF THIS MOTION. SHEILA MACDONALD SECONDED THE MOTION. THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY (9-0-0-0).**

**COMMITTEE REPORTS:**

Audit

The district's Excess & Deficiency for FY13 was certified by the state as submitted.

Facilities	This group is to meet in late February.
Negotiations	The session scheduled for the night before this meeting was snowed out, and rescheduled for February 13.
Policy	This subcommittee made recommendations later in the meeting (see Old Business).
Student Representative	None
Other	None

**NEW BUSINESS:**

Presentation by Jeff Sands on  
Current FY14 Projection

J. Sands presented projections of end-of-FY14 financials and described how administrators arrived at the projections. (His PowerPoint slides are appended to these minutes.) He provided information sorted by school, and separately sorted by program budget (using MA Department of Elementary and Secondary Education categories). The tables of data compare the FY13 budget, FY13 actual spending, FY14 budget, adjusted FY14 figures, and FY14 year-end projection, and list variances by dollar value and by percentage. He said Jan. 31 mid-FY14 figures support the projection administrators made in October, that the district would end the year \$900,000 under budget because of lower-than-anticipated health care costs.

Discussion that followed touched on topics including these:

- how employees' rates of participation affect total cost the full year basis of budgeting that J. Sands said is typical in education, and how forecasts are made based on specific points within that year-long cycle
- whether the district might recoup any of its overpayment of a portion of the cost of health insurance that contractually was to have been paid by teachers
- the process that resulted in reduction of the district's health insurance premiums for FY14;
- the process by which administrators discovered overpayments were occurring, and some budget lines were inaccurate.

R. Kuebel said that because the Committee is in negotiations, the Committee should wait until an executive session to make any further comments about overpayment by the district of a portion of teachers' shares of premiums.

J. Sands then gave a PowerPoint presentation that recapped the main points of the superintendent's recommended FY15 budget. (The slides are appended to these minutes.) He said a level service budget recommended would require a \$485,000 (1.8%) increase in net operating expenses, explained why this is lower than a level service

budget figure specified earlier in the budget planning process, and outlined the process by which district officials narrowed an initial list of \$2.5 million in options for "priority overlays" to five priority overlays for which the superintendent's budget includes \$725,000 in funding. They are full-day kindergarten for all students, a "1 to 1" technology program for two high school grades, technology upgrades district wide, facility and maintenance programs district wide, and creation of new maintenance positions and purchase/leasing of equipment for the new employees' use. In total, maintaining current staffing and programs plus funding the five "priority overlays" would increase the budget \$1.12 million compared to the FY14 forecast (4.6%), he said. He discussed how pay increases based on steps and column changes, per the teachers' contract, contribute to increased cost of maintaining level services.

Discussion that followed touched on topics including these:

- restoration of a team model at the middle school
- whether Dr. Harvey's proposal to look for ways to offer some existing services less expensively, and redirect the savings to other items on the original "priority overlay" list would be agreeable to Town officials; Hamilton Town Manager Mike Lombardo said savings the administration identifies should be broadly discussed with the Towns before such funds are directed to support additional programming.
- whether decreasing spending on some instructional budget lines could reorganize delivery of instruction decreasing the quality of education in HWRSD
- a proposal to reorganize the original "priority overlay" list to indicate which proposals are different ways to achieve things already being done, and which would be new.

#### Opportunity for Public Comment on FY15 Budget

Wenham selectman Patrick Wilson (Larch Row) commended the administration for collaborative hard work on the budget. He announced the Towns and district have received an additional \$90,000 grant to continue preliminary work toward a joint department of public works. He encouraged district officials to consult Manchester-Essex officials about that district's recent grant to create some specific in-district special education services.

Norman Crammer asked why fringe benefits costs declined between 2013 and 2014. J. Sands said the district put the health insurance contract out to bid and negotiated a 10% decrease in its premiums.

Wenham selectman Ken Whittaker (Enon Rd.) inquired about the FY15 technology budget compared to this year's, and said all are in agreement that the district and Towns should collaborate in maintenance functions.

Brigid O'Donnell of Wenham, a teacher at Winthrop Elementary, said teachers' premiums did not decline this year; she asked for more information about the district's decreased costs. Dr. Harvey said the contracts stipulates that the district is to pay 60% of each teacher's health insurance cost, and the teacher is to pay 40%, but administrators discovered that for several years the district paid 70%. In FY2014 the full 40% has been deducted from teachers' paychecks, which offset the overall 10% decrease in the rates. He briefly discussed research underway with a consultant to determine why this district's premiums are higher than some similar districts' and whether there are alternatives that might lower costs.

Dacia Rubel of Wenham (Puritan Rd.) said that recently spending millions of dollars on maintenance projects should have reduced the need for maintenance, and that she hoped if additional maintenance staff hiring takes place it is not at the expense of teaching staff.

Joe ?? of Hamilton (Linden St.) asked who now plows district lots and roadways, and whether an increased maintenance staff (if approved and hired) would need three trucks for this purpose. Dr. Harvey said Town crews and contractors would continue to plow for the district whether or not maintenance staff are hired, but if hiring takes place and the district leases one or more vehicles to deploy staff across its four sites, it would invest \$3500 in a plow attachment so district workers could supplement that effort.

At the microphone for a second time, K. Whittaker said the committee working to establish a joint department of public works proposes that the district pay for maintenance services that would be performed by staff who currently work for the Towns, and use existing Town equipment and vehicles.

Hamilton selectman Marc Johnson (Patton Dr.) advised low rates of increase year to year in the school budget going forward.

Discussion of use of certified excess and deficiency funds

J. Sands presented three scenarios for management of the Excess & Deficiency (E&D) account and projected how Town assessments (in dollars and in the rate of increase year-to-year) would play out in each scenario. (The PowerPoint slides are appended to these minutes). He presented these scenarios [and projected impact]:

- apply the entire current E&D balance to the FY15 budget [FY15 assessment would increase 1.5%; FY16 assessment would increase 10%]
- apply \$1.2 million of it to the FY15 budget and the remainder to the FY16 budget [FY15 assessment would increase 2.7%: FY16 assessment would increase 4.5%]

- apply \$619,000 to the FY15 budget and apply \$900,000 to the FY16 budget (FY15 assessments would increase 5.5%; FY16 assessment would increase 2%)

J. Sands and Dr. Harvey recommended that the district apply the entire E&D balance to the current FY14 budget to return it to the Towns as soon as is practical. Discussion touched on topics including these: the idea of creating a budget line item for contingency funds; whether returning funds immediately would strengthen the district's credibility with voters and increase the likelihood of passage of future budgets; advantages of evening out the rates of increase year to year; and district administrators' reasons for making this recommendation now, but not earlier in the budget season.

A formal budget vote is to take place Feb. 13. At R. Kuebel's request the Committee took an informal vote to assess support for returning all of E&D this year; the show of hands was unanimously in favor.

The Committee then turned to consideration of proposed policies. Following those votes, the Committee ended its meeting with discussion of which spending items to include in the FY15 budget, on which the Committee is to vote on Feb. 13.

Discussion of specific items in  
FY15 Budget, including maintenance

The Committee discussed whether HWRSD should hire maintenance workers, or hold off pending initiation of a joint department with the Towns. B. Dery recommended adding to the budget funds to replace sinks, counters, faucets and bubblers in Winthrop Elementary classrooms, but after discussion, and J. Sands' somewhat different information about the need for and projected cost of the work, an informal straw poll established that only two Committee members supported adding this to the budget. B. Dery also proposed adding funds to replace unit ventilators, units within classrooms that are linked to the central heating system. In response to D. Evans' question, Dr. Harvey said he did not budget funds for online foreign language courses because he is close to securing alternate funding for that purpose; D. Evans asked him to track for the Committee the resolution of topics the Committee considers that turn out to be "budget neutral." In discussion of the overall budget figure and the outlook for the Committee to keep costs level year to year, or to keep increases very low, D. Evans said regulatory directives and unfunded mandates continue to increase and are not budget neutral; R. Kuebel said other districts face the same cost challenges but operate at a lower cost per student.

**OLD BUSINESS:**

2nd Reading of Policies

B. Lawrence said the Policy Working Group has withdrawn proposals for policies on naming facilities and on memorials, and may combine the two into a new proposal. She specified how other policy drafts had been amended since their first presentation at an earlier meeting:

*Consultant*

This policy now says that decisions about consultants should be consistent with the budget, and that CORI checks should be required when appropriate. It no longer refers to working groups.

**BILL WILSON MADE A MOTION THAT THE HW REGIONAL SCHOOL COMMITTEE VOTE TO APPROVE THE POLICY ON CONSULTANTS. SHEILA MACDONALD SECONDED THE MOTION. THE MOTION PASSED 7-1-1-0.** (Bill Dery voted no; Roger Kuebel abstained.)

*Developing Education Specifications*

Lists of specifications that a Committee member previously noted were incomplete have been deleted; the phrase "based on demographics" has been added.

**BILL WILSON MADE A MOTION THAT THE HW REGIONAL SCHOOL COMMITTEE VOTE TO APPROVE THE POLICY ON DEVELOPING SPECIFICATIONS, AS OUTLINED IN EXHIBIT D. SHEILA MACDONALD SECONDED THE MOTION. THE MOTION PASSED 6-2-1-0.** (Jeanise Bertrand and Bill Dery voted no; Roger Kuebel abstained.)

*Safety Program*

Some wording was adjusted without a change in meaning, and the working group added the phrase "in reasonable time."

**BILL WILSON MADE A MOTION THAT THE HW REGIONAL SCHOOL COMMITTEE VOTE TO APPROVE THE SAFETY PROGRAM POLICY AS OUTLINED IN EXHIBIT E. SHEILA MACDONALD SECONDED THE MOTION. THE MOTION PASSED 8-0-0-0.** (Bill Dery voted no.)

*Staff Accident Reports*

A misspelling was corrected and one phrase was reworded to clarify meaning. B. Wilson said a more elaborate policy might be needed if the district acquires vehicles.

**BILL WILSON MADE A MOTION THAT THE HW REGIONAL SCHOOL COMMITTEE VOTE TO APPROVE THE POLICY ON STAFF ACCIDENT REPORTS. SHEILA MACDONALD SECONDED THE MOTION. THE MOTION PASSED 8-1-0-0.** (Bill Dery voted no.)

*Facilities Planning*

The working group revised this draft to state that the Facilities Working Group would report to the School Committee (not, as an earlier draft proposed, to the superintendent). B. Lawrence said the intent is to make sure some portion of the Committee has oversight over maintenance.

**BILL WILSON MADE A MOTION THAT THE HW REGIONAL SCHOOL COMMITTEE VOTE TO APPROVE THE FACILITIES PLANNING POLICY.**

B. Dery said the responsibilities the policy draft expresses should be the role of the director of maintenance, not the Committee or its subcommittees. R. Kuebel suggested the policy state that the working group's responsibilities include, but not be limited to, those listed in the draft policy; the Committee agreed to that amendment by general consent. R. Kuebel read from MGL71 §68, which states that "the School Committee shall have general charge and superintendence of the school houses."

**THE MOTION AS AMENDED PASSED 7-2-0-0.** (Bill Dery and Deb Evans voted no.)

**VOTE TO ADJOURN:**

**BILL DERY MADE A MOTION THAT THE HW REGIONAL SCHOOL COMMITTEE VOTE TO ADJOURN. DEB EVANS SECONDED THE MOTION. THE MOTION PASSED 9-0-0-0.**

The meeting adjourned at 9:56 p.m.

**DOCUMENTS AND EXHIBITS  
USED AT THIS MEETING:**

HWRSD FY1414 Forecast PowerPoint presentation (3 slides)  
Draft policies (Consultants, Developing Educational Specifications, Safety Program, Staff Accident Reports, Facilities Planning) (5 pages)  
HWRSD FY15 Budget Discussion PowerPoint presentation (6 slides)  
HWRSD Excess & Deficiency PowerPoint presentation (5 slides)β

Respectfully submitted,  
Ann Sierks Smith, School Committee recording secretary