

Hamilton-Wenham Regional School District Committee

Meeting of March 8, 2012

Minutes

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

A. McCloughan called the meeting to order at 6:35 p.m. at the Buker Multipurpose Room. The Committee and audience rose for the Pledge of Allegiance.

PRESENT:

Sean Condon, Kym Donnellan, Roger Kuebel, Alexa McCloughan, Ann Minois, Jack O'Keefe, Dacia Rubel (until 9:25), and Larry Swartz

ALSO PRESENT:

Peter Gray, Superintendent (until 9:38); Kathy Harris, Director of Student Services (until 9:20); John Hughes, High School Principal (until 9:20)

ABSENT:

Bill Dery.

ADJUSTMENTS TO AGENDA:

ROGER KUEBEL MADE A MOTION THAT THE HW REGIONAL SCHOOL COMMITTEE VOTE TO AMEND THE AGENDA TO ACCOMMODATE TOPICS THAT THE CHAIR DID NOT REASONABLY ANTICIPATE 48 HOURS BEFORE THE MEETING, SPECIFICALLY AN UPDATE ON THE SUPERINTENDENT SEARCH. JACK O'KEEFE SECONDED THE MOTION. THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY (8-0-0).

**PUBLIC HEARING
ON THE PROPOSED
FY13 BUDGET:**

*Presentation of Budget and
Public Comments*

P. Gray explained the budget review and revision process to date. He noted that at the request of the Towns' finance committees, the current draft of the FY13 budget is a level services budget and the assessments to the Towns would be the same as in FY12. Expenses are budgeted to increase 2.2% over FY12; funds that accumulated in revolving funds over a period of years would offset that 2.2% increase, which is the result of contractual obligations, costs beyond the district's control (such as utility costs), and mandatory handicap accessibility upgrades to Cutler Elementary; the Committee has yet to decide which, if any, other expenses to include in the budget (see page 12 of draft budget presentation for list of proposed uses). He briefly explained revolving funds, circuit breaker funds, and the Excess & Deficiency (E&D) account. He explained selected pages of the budget presentation document, of which printouts were available to the audience; it is appended to these minutes. Among his comments and explanations were these:

- page 2 reports enrollment figures since 2009; since then, district enrollment has fallen by 19 students.

- p. 3 provides an organizational chart of central office staff and principals, including salary information.
- p. 4 is an expense summary; pp. A4-A12 lists all employees by name and their salaries, including stipends for work they perform in addition to their salaried duties (e.g. coaching).
- p. A-3 reports what the Committee spends.
- p. 5 reports budgeted FY12 revenue, projected actual FY12 revenue, and budgeted FY13 revenue.
- p. 6 is an analysis of the FY12 operating statement; it projects a \$665,371 excess at the close of the fiscal year.
- p. 7 is an analysis of the E&D account. Revolving account balances totaling \$628,844 will transfer to the general fund at the close of the fiscal year, at which time the E&D balance (before state certification) is projected to be \$3,221,325.
- p. 12 lists proposed uses of that fund balance, other than facilities projects. The draft budget allocates \$892,062 to balance the FY13 budget; the Committee wants input about how citizens feel the remainder should be used. P. Gray briefly explained each proposal and the rationale for it; pp. 15–19 and pp. A-13 – A-16 include more information about some of the projects, and administrators' recommendations for or against them.
- p. 13 lists proposed facilities projects.
- p. 14 lists proposed information technology capital purchases.

A. McCloughan invited the public to comment and ask questions.

Richard Boroff of Moynihan Rd., Hamilton said he does not think the budget is educationally adequate; stated that a Town official's statement about decreased enrollment was somewhat inaccurate; and said one-time funds should only be used for one-time expenses.

Rick Mitchell of Rock Maple Ave., Hamilton expressed concern about using one-time funds for staff positions that would result in long-term ongoing expenses; said the district has not documented that additional instructional technology (IT) staff would create financial savings; and encouraged the Committee to take an active role in arranging to share a maintenance department with the Towns. He advised against bonding the already completed, already paid for boiler work at Cutler School. He and R. Kuebel discussed potential savings of a joint DPW.

R. Boroff said the Committee deferred building maintenance in the past because members doubted voters would approve the necessary expenditures. He said Town staff has no more maintenance expertise than district staff.

Deb Evans of Porter St., Wenham encouraged the Committee to add educationally qualitative options to the list of things that could be paid for in FY13 with one-time funds. She suggested using some of this money to increase the professional development budget; P. Gray said the existing budget is sufficient.

D. Rubel emphasized that \$892,000 of the funds available for one-time spending are to be allocated to support the FY13 budget. L. Swartz said the Committee hopes to find savings to offset some of this sum in future budgets.

Serge Sacharuk of Main St., Wenham endorsed R. Mitchell's statement about facilities maintenance. He also said the district treats its teachers well, and stated that teachers are to receive a 6% raise. A. McCloughan said his latter statement was incorrect, and only certain teachers would receive that increase in the coming budget year.

Tracy Hutchinson of Wenham suggested using excess funds to pay for new software discussed at prior meetings; P. Gray said the software is to be purchased this spring with money from the FY12 budget. She asked about the pending new staff evaluation system and the role an HR staffer would play; P. Gray provided details. She encouraged the Committee to include in the budget money to hire literacy and math specialists requested by elementary principals.

Tracy Mayor of Fox Run Rd., Hamilton said if the high school were placed on NEASC probation it would put seniors at a competitive disadvantage in college admissions. She said correcting problems that NEASC cited would be a good investment of one-time funds.

Tom Rogers of Sagamore St., Hamilton said he thought the \$500,000 "give-back" from the district to the Towns in FY12 was a one-time event. P. Gray said the Towns interpret level funding to mean they will contribute no more to the district in FY13 than they did in FY12. A. McCloughan said the FY12 "give back" reset the bar. T. Rogers asked why the district has stopped prepaying some SPED tuition; P. Gray and K. Harris said it does not result in a discount. T. Rogers inquired about grant benefits of the Race to the Top program that requires the district to implement the new state evaluation system before other Massachusetts districts do. P. Gray said the district received a \$5,000 grant; A. McCloughan said it might not have been a good idea to apply to the Race to the Top program. T. Rogers criticized the existing Edline software and urged the Committee to choose another product.

Lynnette Fallon of Farrington Lane, Hamilton urged the Committee not to rule out using one-time funds for expenses that would continue in future year. She said HWRSD principals' requests for additional spending are modest compared to other districts and reported that by her calculation, 13 districts to which this district often compares itself are proposing budget increase for FY13 ranging from 0 to 13.4%, with the average proposed increase at 4.5%.

Lisa Kane of Hamilton Ave., Hamilton asked the Committee to speak about addressing staffing and student teacher ratios to reduce costs. A. McCloughan said the Committee plans to attend to these issues and

believes new software will help in this effort, but that staff transitions made it impossible to do so in the FY12 or FY13 budget. J. Hughes discussed features of the high school curriculum and facility that drive costs, and said it takes at least 18 months to plan and execute curricular program change. He said as an interim principal he was not in a position to make cuts.

High school senior Connor Schmidt of Fox Run Rd., Hamilton advocated lower user fees for all extracurricular activities, not just athletics. P. Gray agreed and said he plans to adjust the proposed budget accordingly.

R. Boroff characterized this year's budget planning process as the Towns telling the schools what to do.

L. Fallon said this district's per pupil spending is growing at a rate below the state average; she cited her calculations (based on data on state websites) that several years ago it was 8% above the state average but in FY11 was 4% above the average.

Kathy Swierzewski asked district officials to involve two high school staff members in the planning of work in the high school auditorium to ensure the work does not negatively impact the acoustics.

Discussion of NEASC Accreditation

J. Hughes described the New England Association of Schools and Colleges and its accreditation process and 10-year cycle; he also discussed the nature of and reasons for NEASC warnings and probation when a school does not make progress to meet NEASC standards. He said the most recent NEASC report on the high school in 2006 listed 55 to 70 items the school needed to improve, and that NEASC is satisfied with the high school's action on all but 5 of them. L. Swartz said he found no evidence on the NEASC website that schools ever lose accreditation.

Discussion of SPED Budget

K. Harris responded to questions Town officials asked at a joint meeting with the Committee the night before this meeting. She provided details about the "special education increment" program by which the state partially reimburses districts when choice students receive extensive SPED services; she said no HWRHS choice students receive SPED services at the high level that would trigger the SPED increment reimbursement. Discussion followed. She revised and clarified budget projections she made at prior meetings. Because of new developments regarding student needs for services, she withdrew her prior projection that the district would underspend this year on out-of-district SPED tuition. She said budget materials mistakenly bundle together a number of anticipated FY13 SPED expense reductions, and overstate the salary expense reduction she anticipates for FY13; she said she anticipates that reducing SPED staff by 3 or 4 full-time equivalent positions would reduce the budget by \$250,000 to \$300,000, not the \$400,000 that has

been stated in budget forums. She said she could not project actual spending for the remainder of this school year because some students' situations remain unresolved. She provided information about contracted services, SPED transportation, tuition increases at specialized schools, the increase this year in state circuit breaker funding, and her request for a \$100,000 SPED emergency fund and other districts' practice in this regard.

Discussion continued about circuit breaker funds. R. Kuebel asked P. Gray to revise p. 8 of the budget proposal to update some data. L. Swartz and P. Gray discussed transfers between revolving funds and the E&D account, and whether money already in district accounts could be used going forward as a SPED emergency fund.

NEXT MEETING DATE:

The Committee decided to forward remaining questions to A. McCloughan, and continue discussion of the budget during its meeting scheduled for 7 p.m. Mon. March 12, during which the Committee also planned to review teacher input regarding the search for a new superintendent. They also scheduled a meeting for 8:15 p.m. Wed. March 14 to vote on the budget.

OLD BUSINESS:

Superintendent Search

A. Minois and L. Swartz reported they reviewed bids for consulting work to assist the superintendent search committee. Pending reference checks they recommended contracting with the New England School Development Council (NESDEC). The Committee briefly discussed the highest priority tasks for the consultant and the process for moving forward with a contract.

ROGER KUEBEL MADE A MOTION THAT THE HW REGIONAL SCHOOL COMMITTEE VOTE TO AUTHORIZE THE ASSISTANT TREASURER TO ENTER INTO A CONTRACT WITH NESDEC TO ASSIST WITH THE SUPERINTENDENT SEARCH FOR A SUM NOT TO EXCEED \$11,500. KYM DONNELLAN SECONDED THE MOTION. THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY (7-0-0).

ADJOURNMENT:

ROGER KUEBEL MADE A MOTION THAT THE HW REGIONAL SCHOOL COMMITTEE VOTE TO ADJOURN. KYM DONNELLAN SECONDED THE MOTION. THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY (7-0-0).

The meeting adjourned at 9:44 p.m.

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

Fiscal Year 2013 Budget, Draft, March 8, 2013

Respectfully submitted,

Ann Sierks Smith, School Committee recording secretary