

Hamilton-Wenham Regional School District Committee

Meeting of March 12, 2012
Minutes**CALL TO ORDER AND PLEDGE
OF ALLEGIANCE:**

A. McCloughan called the meeting to order at 7:02 p.m. at the Buker Multipurpose Room. The Committee and audience rose for the Pledge of Allegiance.

PRESENT:

Kym Donnellan, Roger Kuebel, Alexa McCloughan, Ann Minois, Jack O'Keefe, Dacia Rubel, and Larry Swartz

ALSO PRESENT:

Peter Gray, Superintendent (until 9:55)

ABSENT:

Sean Condon and Bill Dery

DISCUSSION ON FY13 BUDGET:

P. Gray highlighted the changes on revised FY2013 budget proposal pages he provided to the Committee at this meeting. (Those revised documents, with "R" in the page numbers to signify "revised," are appended to these minutes.) Adjustments show a reduced salary line due to anticipated SPED staff reductions; a transfer of funds out of the Excess & Deficiency (E&D) account to offset FY13 expenses; and slight reduction of FY12 expenses due to some actual costs being under budget. He said the capital maintenance project worksheet is still being updated as information gathering about costs continues, and the maintenance and technology budgets remain confusing so the heads of those departments are revising the relevant budget pages to present information more clearly. He said reallocation of a line item from one department to another may account for the apparently higher central office expenses that appear on budget worksheets, and that he would continue to look into it.

The Committee asked numerous questions about all-day kindergarten revenue and encumbrance of funds to zero out that budget line, and asked for further clarification of these accounts at a future meeting. R. Kuebel asked P. Gray to revise that page of the budget to show gross operating expenses, some offsets, and a net expense budget. The Committee also requested recent years' all-day kindergarten revenue figures for comparison.

P. Gray said the chair of one of the FinComs asked him to add an expense line item showing the return of \$500,000 to the Towns; he made that adjustment. L. Swartz commented and several other Committee members agreed that the budget should not include such a placeholder at this time, but rather that the Committee should first consider all budget requests and deliberate about which to include in the FY13 budget, and subsequently consider what to do with remaining excess funds.

P. Gray said paying 20% of user fees for extracurricular activities as well as sports would add \$5,000 to the budget. He and the Committee discussed at length whether the current draft of the athletic budget includes the cost of restoring a full schedule to fall sports, but this remained unresolved; P. Gray said he would consult the athletic director to clarify it. They also discussed the interplay between lowering user fees, but increasing the total athletic budget by going to a full fall schedule, and the fact that families would therefore not get a full 20% reduction from current athletic user fees because the 80% they would pay would be calculated based on a higher total cost than this year's. L. Swartz

questioned whether the cost of increasing fall sports by two games would cost as much as the athletic director projects.

P. Gray said FY12 year to date parking fee revenue exceeds related expenses by about \$20,000.

He said he inquired about instructional technology staff in Manchester-Essex (M-E) schools per a selectman's request, and learned that the M-E district employs 9.5 IT staff for its 4 schools; HWRSD employs 9 for 5 schools.

He noted that he assembled materials that Town boards requested, and included the 10-page letter high school principal John Hughes wrote to NEASC regarding the high school's probation status with the accrediting agency. (The packet of supplemental materials is appended to these minutes.)

A. McCloughan discussed the difficulty of accurately projecting choice enrollment and achieving full enrollment at the high school through choice admissions.

P. Gray reviewed changes this year in the accounting positions.

Committee members closely examined circuit breaker revenue as listed in the budget proposal and discussed whether it properly takes the circuit breaker revolving fund into account. L. Swartz maintained that the budget proposal overstates the level of circuit breaker funds available for FY13 use.

Their recollections differed about the sum the Student Services Director wants available as a SPED emergency fund in FY13 and asked P. Gray to have her clarify this and indicate whether a certain sum in the circuit breaker revolving account would suffice.

The committee reviewed the list of proposed uses for accumulated extra funds, and:

- acknowledged the district is behind on cyclical updating of technology; discussed the request to increase the instructional technology (IT) staffing budget so existing IT jobs would move from school-year to full-year positions; discussed whether staff increases or use of IT contractors is a better short term strategy; whether to create a technology plan; and sharing some IT services with the Towns.
- very briefly revisited details of the proposal to set the E&D account at 3% of budget, and affirmed their support for this.
- discussed whether a new teacher evaluation system requires a new human resources director long-term, or could be managed short-term by existing district staff or a contractor, or by hiring later after the program begins and demands are clearer. P. Gray strongly advocated adding the position.
- favored budgeting \$88,000 to pay 20% of the cost of extracurricular sports and activities, to reduce user fees from 100% to 80%. They discussed but did not resolve whether to commit to this long-term.
- favored increasing the athletic scholarship fund by \$10,000

- held to their prior consensus to take no action on the proposal to add another part-time middle school assistant principal to fill out the schedule of the part-time assistant principal now under contract.
- reached no consensus about whether to hire more elementary math tutors as recommended by the elementary school principals. P. Gray said the single tutor who now works at all three schools reports receiving inadequate direction. Suggestions included adding half-time rather than full-time tutors, tabling this so the new superintendent could decide this issue, or asking staff if there are better ways to meet the need.
- agreed to increase Buker's library/media specialist from a .8 FTE position to full time, as at the other elementary schools.
- acknowledged the need to make ADA upgrades at Cutler, expressed concern that the budget request for \$75,000 may be too low, and agreed expressed willingness to increase that line item when firm cost information is obtained.
- agreed something needs to be done regarding seating in the auditorium but reached no firm recommendation, because a firm contacted about repairing broken seats has not yet submitted a bid. They remarked that such work should avoid negative impact on acoustics.
- affirmed principal support for hiring a development officer and discussed whether to budget for this in mid-FY13, or in a future year.
- reviewed business office staffing. L. Swartz questioned the need for an assistant superintendent for finance, a business manager, plus an accounting clerk; he suggested hiring temps as needed. D. Rubel cautioned against understaffing. P. Gray said that office needs a clerk to do data entry now performed by the business manager, so she has time to analyze accounts to detect and resolve the type of issues identified by the operational audit. The Committee requested P. Andrews' presence at a future meeting to discuss the proposed position.

L. Swartz suggested reducing staff costs by not filling some positions vacated by retirements. Four high school teacher (all department chairs) and a Buker teacher have announced they will retire at the end of this school year. Members agreed a strong case has been made for replacing the retiring high school teachers.

They discussed the parameters of a joint meeting scheduled for later in the week with both Towns' selectmen and FinComs.

They also discussed the use of one-time funds for ongoing expenses. D. Rubel said that between user fee funding and transfers to balance the budget, \$984,000 in one-time funds would be used for ongoing expenses. L. Swartz said about \$500,000 to \$600,000 would remain after spending the funds committed so far; he noted the Towns have asked this money to turn back to the towns, but he suggested the board consider reserving it to repair the Winthrop roof. They contemplated a warrant article earmarking it to pay for major maintenance expenses. They reviewed contract details regarding staff bonuses, cost of living adjustments, and raises for years served and for continuing education that will increase personnel costs in future years.

SUPERINTENDENT SEARCH:

R. Kuebel updated the Committee about the search committee's work. He reported that student representative Ian MacLean resigned from the committee because of other commitments and recommended the Committee appoint Connor Schmidt as the new student rep.

ROGER KUEBEL MADE A MOTION THAT THE HW REGIONAL SCHOOL COMMITTEE VOTE TO APPOINT CONNOR SCHMIDT TO THE SUPERINTENDENT SEARCH COMMITTEE. THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY. (7-0-0).

Committee members reported on input at public forums regarding the search for a new superintendent. Attendance at the forums at 3 schools ranged from 1 to 9 people. Common themes expressed at each meeting were that the superintendent should have a strong teaching background, and that the Committee should not "settle" for a weak candidate. Faculty comments included a desire for a dynamic leader who is not a top down manager and would raise teacher morale, be on the cutting edge, nurture collegiality and teamwork, respect and solicit faculty opinions, and spend time in the schools. Other desirable qualities mentioned included program vision, operational skills, facility for establishing community and business connections, and sincerity.

Members suggested revisions of and new material for the draft profile to be forwarded to the search committee as an outline of the qualifications and competencies the Committee believes the new superintendent should have. They agreed D. Rubel would incorporate the suggested changes into the draft and circulate an updated version to the Committee before the next meeting, and to the search consultant. (The draft profile is appended to these minutes.)

ROGER KUEBEL MADE A MOTION THAT THE HW REGIONAL SCHOOL COMMITTEE VOTE TO ADJOURN. JACK O'KEEFE SECONDED THE MOTION. THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY (7-0-0).

The meeting adjourned at 10:22 p.m.

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

Revised budget worksheets
Supplemental material requested by Town boards
Superintendent Search Leadership Profile (12 March 2012 draft) (1 page)

Respectfully submitted,

Ann Sierks Smith, School Committee recording secretary