

**ROCHESTER SCHOOL COMMITTEE MEETING
BUDGET SUBCOMMITTEE MINUTES
Rochester, Massachusetts
March 13, 2024 at 1:00 p.m.**

This meeting was conducted in a hybrid format. School Committee, Administrators and the public had the option of meeting in person at Superintendent's Conference Room in the Superintendent's Office, 135 Marion Road, Mattapoisett, MA 02739 or via zoom.

COMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT: Sharon Hartley (in-person), Robin Rounseville (in-person) and Anne Fernandes (remote).

ABSENT: Jason Chisholm and Katherine Duggan

ADMINISTRATORS: Michael S. Nelson, Superintendent of Schools (in-person) and Howard Barber, Asst. Superintendent of Finance & Operations (in-person).

OTHERS PRESENT: Glenn Cannon, Town Administrator, Kristian Stoltenberg, Finance Committee and Suzanne Szyndlar, Finance Director.

Chairperson Hartley called the meeting to order at 1:06 p.m.

SUMMARY OF DISCUSSION:

Superintendent Nelson welcomed everyone present and thanked them for coming together on short notice. He shared with those present the proposed FY25 budget that has not yet been approved by the school committee with a total of \$7,248,642, along with a comparison of the last three years provided by Mr. Barber. Ms. Szyndlar shared a Revenue Estimating Worksheet that should the actual FY2023 and FY2024 sources of revenue for the Town of Rochester along with the estimated sources for FY2025.

Superintendent Nelson reiterated that this is a level service budget. He explained the transportation contract for bus service expires this year and after multiple bids, this expense has increased approximately 35%. Mr. Barber reviewed the comparison sharing that there have been no changes or additions in any positions and the special education is expected costs and does not include any unknown costs that could come up during the school year.

Mr. Stoltenberg inquired about the bus contract and process. Mr. Barber explained that they were surprised to receive two bids in the second solicitation; typically that is not the case. Mr. Stoltenberg confirmed the district does not charge a bus fee and he recognizes that transportation is not a flexible expense. He sympathized with the school but the increase of \$200,000 was unexpected and the Town has no newfound money. He also expressed the Finance Committee would like to review the ORR proposed budget in order to get the full picture for all Rochester students.

Ms. Szyndlar explained the Town is working with a 3.55% increase and there are unexpected costs with the Town as well such as the new contract for waste and recycling. This has been one of the most challenging budget years she has seen. She shared with the subcommittee that between Rochester Memorial School and Old Rochester, the Town would like the schools to decrease by \$300,000. The Town is \$600,000 in the red with current projections, so the Town will also work on decreasing by \$300,000.

Superintendent Nelson explained he understands the information presented but wanted to be sure to state that beyond this year, if staffing is cut, then more students could be out-placed in the future as they will not be able to handle the students in the building with less staff. This could increase mandated costs for the Town that the schools have no control over.

Ms. Hartley appreciated the work of the Town and that the budget is level service. If the Budget Subcommittee, in thinking of the best way to serve families, cannot bring it to the place the Town is looking for, what will be done? Ms. Szyndlar said the Town would like to see the ORR budget as Rochester is down twenty-six students but up over \$200,000 in expenses and the majority of the expenses in the Town belongs to the schools. Superintendent Nelson stated the proposed ORR budget would be shared in the next day or so and he reiterated that even if they get creative this year, they will be in the same place next year. Mr. Cannon said the Town is worried about that as well, with projections looking even worse for FY2026. The Town Officials all agreed this is not ideal and they have always supported the schools.

Ms. Rounseville said she appreciates the support of this group and she knows it is not that they do not want to support the schools but she wanted to also reiterate that cuts impact the future and they need to keep the students in mind. Ms. Fernandes thanked the Town Officials as well for going into the weeds and really working to look at the budget more closely. She shared that she would not be in favor of an override. He recommended the Budget Subcommittee meet again next week to develop plan A as the current level service budget and plan B with potential decreases.

Meeting was adjourned at 2:23 p.m.

Motion by Ms. Rounseville

Motion Seconded by Ms. Fernandes

ROLL CALL: Hartley: yes, Rounseville; yes, Fernandes: yes.

Motion Passed 3-0

Respectfully submitted,



Michael S. Nelson

Superintendent of Schools