

**ROCHESTER SCHOOL COMMITTEE MEETING  
BUDGET SUBCOMMITTEE MINUTES  
Rochester, Massachusetts  
October 3, 2024 at 5:30 p.m.**

*This meeting was conducted in a hybrid format. School Committee, Administrators and the public had the option of meeting in person at Rochester Memorial School, 16 Pine Street, Rochester, MA 02770 or via zoom.*

**COMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT:** Sharon Hartley, Katherine Duggan, Anne Fernandes, Robin Rounseville and Joshua Trombly (all in-person).

**ABSENT:** None.

**ADMINISTRATORS:** Michael S. Nelson, Superintendent of Schools, Charles West, Assistant Principal.

Chairperson Hartley called the meeting to order at 5:32 p.m.

**SUMMARY OF DISCUSSION:**

Superintendent Nelson introduced the budget process for FY2026. He shared the FY25 Budget Presentation and the approved FY25 budget for reference. He reminded the school committee of an upcoming Massachusetts Association of Regional Schools (M.A.R.S) meeting entitled *Uniting to Raise Awareness of the Financial Challenges Faced by Districts in Hold Harmless Status* which he had shared with all school committee members across our schools because each district is currently in ‘hold harmless’ status. This means the current Chapter 70 funding formula from the state is not meeting the needs of our schools and students. There are over 200 districts across the state that are in this status. He continued that grant opportunities over the last few years have been significant for the district, including ESSER funds, literacy, OpenSciEd, social emotional and technology grants. However, these are all one-time funds and grant funding opportunities are decreasing. He reminded the school committee members that most of the operating budget in recent years has been to maintain level service.

Next, Superintendent Nelson reviewed that the main budget drivers in this process will likely again be salaries, special education tuition, transportation and contracted services. He also recalled that last budget season, special education out of district tuition in the amount of \$300,000 was a special article and one-time funding. However, the related special education cases did come to fruition so there will need to be discussion about a long-term plan whether it be in the operating budget or another article for the Town.

Lastly, he shared that next steps, if the committee supports it, will be to begin to develop the FY26 budget, tying the work back to the School Improvement Plan and the Strategic Plan, Vision2028. He reviewed the examples of blank documents used for the administrators to make requests, propose changes and share accomplishments for the budget process. School Committee requests on Form 1 are due by November 14<sup>th</sup>.

School Committee Feedback:

Chairperson Hartley reminded the school committee that Ms. Suzanne Szyndlar from the Town of Rochester is retiring in January and she would like to meet with her in late fall for information, guidance and advice for the budget season prior to her retirement. She also reminded the school committee that Mr. Kristian Stoltenberg also left the Finance Committee and both these individuals were great partners to the schools during budget season.

Ms. Fernandes recommended inviting Mr. James Austin of the Finance Committee to the meetings earlier this year. The members agreed after they have their priorities aligned when an initial draft is available.

Ms. Fernandes asked if it was still the philosophy to keep classes at 22 students or so because 6<sup>th</sup> grade is at 26 each this year. Superintendent Nelson said administration historically tries hard to do this but it will be part of the conversation with fiscal challenges.

Meeting was adjourned at 6:24 p.m.

Motion by Ms. Rounseville

Motion Seconded by Ms. Fernandes

Motion Passed 5-0

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "M. Nelson".

Michael S. Nelson

Superintendent of Schools