Approved by the HWRSD School Committee on January 16, 2025

HAMILTON-WENHAM REGIONAL SCHOOL DISTRICT

5 School Street, Wenham, MA 01984 • Tel. 978-468-5310

School Committee Meeting (agenda)
Zoom Webinar Meeting
Zoomlink ID: 85679685083
Thursday, January 2, 2025
7:00 p.m. - 8:31 p.m.

Present via zoom:
Dana Allara
Julia Campbell
Jen Carr
David Frenkel
Trent Honda
Amy Kunberger
David Polito

Also Present via zoom:
Eric Tracy, HWRSD Superintendent
Vincent Leone, Assistant Superintendent

1. Call to Order
At 7:04 p.m. Dana Allara called the meeting to order. Roll call attendance for the zoom meeting: Dana Allara, Julia Campbell, Jen Carr, David Frenkel, Trent Honda, Amy Kunberger and David Polito.

2. Citizen's Comments Exhibit
Any citizen wishing to speak before the Committee shall identify themself by name and address. Speakers will be allowed three (3) minutes to present their material.

There was no citizen comment.

3. Consent Agenda
a. Warrants Exhibit
- Voucher No. 15
- Voucher No. 1022
- Voucher No. 1023
- Voucher No. 1024
- Voucher No. 4065
- Voucher No. 4066
- Voucher No. 4067
- Voucher No. 4068
- Voucher No. 4069
- Voucher No. 4070

- Voucher No. 4071

b. Donations
   - HWAFIC - Turf Field Project; $789,587.61 Exhibit

In response to a question, Superintendent Tracy stateherd that the public is able to watch this meeting via the webinar link listed on the agenda and that there are people currently watching the meeting through that link. In addition, the recording of the meeting will be given to HWCAM to upload to their site.

Dana Allara requested to hold the donation from the consent agenda.

I move that the Hamilton-Wenham Regional School Committee approve the warrants as presented in the consent agenda of the packet.

Motion by: David Polito **Seconded by: Amy Kunberger**

ROLL CALL VOTE MOTION PASSED 7-0 (Members Allara, Campbell, Carr, Frenkel, Honda, Kunberger and Polito)

Dana Allara stated that she held the donation from the consent agenda because she wanted an opportunity for the Committee to discuss the donation.

I move that the Hamilton-Wenham Regional School Committee accept the donation from the Hamilton-Wenham Athletic Fields Improvement Committee for $789,587.61 as presented in tonight's agenda.

Motion by: David Polito **Seconded by: Jen Carr**

Superintendent Tracy and the Committee members discussed the work of the HWAFIC Committee to raise money for the field project. They thanked all those involved and also all who donated. In response to a question, Superintendent Tracy stated that the actual final cost for the project will not be determined until all change orders come in over the next six months.

ROLL CALL VOTE MOTION PASSED 7-0 (Members Allara, Campbell, Carr, Frenkel, Honda, Kunberger and Polito)

4. Finance and Operations

a. Vote Superintendent's Tentative FY26 Budget Proposal Exhibit, Exhibit

Assistant Superintendent Leone reviewed the proposed FY26 budget.
In response to questions, Assistant Superintendent Leone stated the following:

The number of school choice students has been dropping over the past few years as bigger numbers of school choice students are graduating than are entering. He stated that he has reduced the number of school choice students in the budget by 6.

Based on the recommendation of the Capital Finance Committee, the funds for the replacement boiler are excluded from this budget. He stated that if the Q2 end-of-year forecast remains the same as Q1, ($600,000) a request to transfer funds may be presented to the School Committee for boiler replacement this year.

This proposed budget increase does not get the district to a place where we are not talking about an operational override. Between now and the final budget vote the administration will be presenting further budget reductions to the Committee for consideration.

Assistant Superintendent Leone stated that if everything holds constant and FY25 ends on budget it would most likely result in the need for an operational override in FY27. If we end FY25 with a surplus we could use that as an offset. He stated that it really depends on how FY25 ends and also what happens with the Towns' budgets as well.

If the Q2 end-of-year forecast remains the same as Q1, most likely the Committee will be asked to approve a transfer of funds for the boiler replacement. He used the savings from the lower health insurance premiums as one example of the possible funds available.

I move that the Hamilton-Wenham Regional School Committee approve the tentative FY26 general fund expenditures budget of $45,824,747 this amount includes general fund operating expenses, after offsets, in the amount of $43,876,840 and general fund debt service expenses, after offsets, in the amount of $1,947,907; furthermore the gross operating expenses of the district, before offsets, have been allocated by the DESE defined chart of accounts according to the "summary by DESE category" chart included in this budget presentation, as detailed in the exhibit.

Motion by: David Polito **Seconded by: Julia Campbell**

ROLL CALL VOTE MOTION PASSED 7-0 (Members Allara, Campbell, Carr, Frenkel Honda, Kunberger and Polito)

Assistant Superintendent Leone stated that he anticipates at the next meeting that the administration will be presenting to the Committee some reductions to the budget presented this evening.

5. Superintendent's Report

Superintendent Tracy updated the Committee on the boiler situation at the high school. He stated that the district has had HVAC experts come in and all have determined the 3 boilers are at their end of life. They have used parts from one boiler to keep the other two boilers operational and the district has rented 2 boilers on an 18-wheeler for two months. The rented boilers need to be installed and inspected by the district insurance company and he anticipates that will happen over the next few days. He reviewed the next steps the district is looking at for

possible boiler replacements including boiler types, rebates, incentives, and the timeline. He thanked the facilities staff for their work over the break on this issue.

6. Chair's Report
Dana Allara stated that she has information she would like to discuss with the Committee. She stated that over the past several months she has observed and addressed actions by one member that has concerned her as Chair.

She stated the following: Several months ago member David Frenkel applied for a grant on behalf of the district without authorization to do so and after having been specifically told that the district was not interested in obtaining the products offered by the grant. On that grant statement, he made inaccurate and false statements on the application. Separately, also a few months ago, the Hamilton Board of Health agenda had an agenda item that included a presentation and discussion on joint Hamilton-Wenham Boards regulation with regards to air and water quality in the Hamilton-Wenham Regional School District with invited guest Mr. David Frenkel, member Wenham Board of Health. Separately, this fall David Frenkel reached out to a teacher and an administration in the district to set up meetings to discuss matters that are within the purview of the school and he did so without the authorization of the Superintendent.

She stated that she has sought to manage these situations as she normally does by working directly with the individual member reviewing relevant protocols, expressing her concerns, consulting with MASC, talking about Charting the Course, Open Meeting Laws, and offering her support in ways to navigate the workings of the Committee.

She stated that most recently, just before the holiday, David Frenkel wrote an article in the *HW News,* the new newspaper in town, in which he asked citizens to write to this Committee to request an indoor air quality plan and budget allocation for said plan. As part of the article, he created a petition to this Committee for citizens to sign to request budgetary allocations and superintendent goals be created for indoor air quality. She stated that she did not address these final topics, the article and petition, with David Frenkel for a couple of reasons. First, she felt that the previous interventions have thus far been ineffective, and second, she spent some time reflecting on the Committee's protocols and her duty to them and she felt that it was respectful and appropriate to provide transparency to the entire Committee at this time. And, she stated while she has been referencing the protocols read at the top of the meetings, it has come to her attention that David Frenkel has told the administration that he is unwilling to sign the voted and approved protocols.

She stated that she is requesting guidance and wisdom from the Committee on how to move forward. She asked if the Committee wants the Chair to continue to approach members one-on-one, or does the Committee prefer these matters be brought to the full Committee, or is there some other guidance the Committee would like to offer.

Julia Campbell asked David Frenkel why he would not sign the protocols.

David Frenkel stated that he has come to disagree with a couple of the key elements. He stated that the protocols essentially ban dissent, once a decision is made there is no accommodation for continuing dissent and so he does not want to give up that right.

Julia Campbell stated that our vote is our dissent, that is how she sees it and that is what MASC has said to her.

David Frenkel stated that he also finds the Committee does not follow the protocol, and the Committee does not fully debate with all facts and with due depth of diligence. He stated that there are several inaccuracies in what Dana Allara outlined as allegations and with no notice of this and nothing in writing he is not going to respond to these allegations. He stated that what she stated is misleading and she also failed to mention that in his column in the *HWNews,* he was specific that he was not representing the views of the Committee or the Board of Health.

Dana Allara stated that it is accurate that he did say that in the article but that as a member of a Committee, one just can't do anything and say they are not speaking as a member of the Committee.

David Frenkel stated that he has a First Amendment right.

Dana Allara stated that she has not said any laws were broken or that there needs to be a legal proceeding she stated she is talking about the ways the Committee works, the procedures and protocols, and she is at a loss as to how to handle this situation.

Julia Campbell stated that there is debate and there are members that disagree on different things but as a Committee, after the debate, she personally feels there should be some degree of unity certainly around things like the budget, things that the Committee has to present to the town.

David Frenkel stated that he agreed that some resolutions should have the full force of enforceability but there are others that fall outside that which reflect the possibilities of future actions, future expenditures that in his opinion require more debate than the Committee gives them and more thoughtful fact-based research where in fact there has been just dismissal with no facts so he feels that is outside the protocol and that forces him to seek alternative redress.

Jen Carr asked what feedback MASC provided to Dana Allara regarding the situation, applying for the grant.

Dana Allara stated that no one would have a hard time understanding why providing false information on a grant would be inappropriate but she did speak to MASC and they recommended she speak to the member and explain again that grants were not to be applied for by individual members, that is not an appropriate thing and she did that.

Amy Kunberger stated that the Committee discussed the protocols at an open meeting and asked David Frenkel if he had an issue with one or more of the protocols why he did not propose a new protocol or an edit rather than just not signing the protocols.

David Frenkel stated that he did not believe he was at the meeting when the protocol renewal came up otherwise he may have objected.

Amy Kunberger stated that she would have a hard time imagining how the Committee would move forward and get things done if the Committee were constantly revisiting things already voted on. She stated that she knows it is frustrating to have something you disagree with the majority on but it is hard to be able to keep revisiting past issues when there are a lot of new things the Committee needs to work on.

Julia Campbell stated that unfortunately she has missed a lot of meetings whether due to health issues or other reasons and she also missed the meeting where protocols were discussed but unfortunately, if members miss a meeting where there is a vote, there is not much we can do. She stated she doesn't think a member can say I didn't go to the meeting so I didn't vote so now I disagree, that is going down a slippery slope of making a vote seem not valid.

David Frenkel stated that he does not believe that it is obligatory to sign the protocols.

Dana Allara stated that she is not saying anything that has been done is illegal, she is making the Committee aware of the fact that she heard that David Frenkel told the administration that he is unwilling to sign the protocol and that is the entirety of her statement.

Trent Honda asked if all School Committees in Massachusetts have protocols.

Dana Allara stated she does not know but she does know that it is typical that School Committees have protocols and they are typically written by Committees and they are not uniform.

David Polito stated that he had a similar situation with a different School Committee during his tenure and part of the reason the protocols are the way they are is because of his work then as Chair. He stated that unfortunately there is not much you can do in this situation because there isn't any recourse action, it has to be upheld within the Committee. The way the Committee works is in the majority. He stated it is important to remember the job of the School Committee is to navigate the ship in the general direction and then allow our captain and operations staff to do the actual work it takes to go in the direction we are choosing. So the act of due diligence on specific matters is actually beyond the scope of what most of the work we do as a Committee involves. He stated that while he understands where David Frenkel's passion lies and it is admirable, it does get in the way of operating the district more often than not at this point and to go off on a rogue tangent because a member is not getting their way on the votes is childish. He stated that David Frenkel is a successful man who has dealt with boards before and understands that you don't always get your way on a board vote. He stated that at the last

meeting, David Frenkel brought up the idea of the energy audit and that was a good way of taking something aligned with his goals and that could be beneficial to the district and the Committee voted in favor of putting that in place through the proper channels. He stated that School Committee members cannot get involved in daily operations as that will only hinder the progress we are trying to make in the district. He stated that he understands and respects David Frenkel's passion on this topic but wants to stress how important it is for the district and community that the Committee work collaboratively and not dwell or try to readdress something that has in fact been voted down by a majority of the Committee. He stated the importance of all members realizing the job of Committee members is navigating the overall direction of the school district.

David Frenkel stated that he appreciated the Committee's support on the energy engineering assessment. He stated that what motivated his column was more than one Committee member making clear they were never going to debate or revisit it in perpetuity and he thought that was an extreme position to take and it wasn't driven by any evidence so he was encouraging parents to speak up because Dana Allara has said on many occasions that she never receives any correspondence that calls for those actions so, therefore, it can't be important so he thought a way to address that was to check out whether the community does care.

Jen Carr stated that this situation sounds like it is extremely stressful and asked Dana Allara if she wants the Committee to take a more active role in dealing with this.

Dana Allara stated that she does not feel overwhelmed but is coming to the Committee because she doesn't feel the interventions she has been using have been effective so she is looking for guidance from the Committee. She stated that she understands that this is the first time the members are hearing this so it may be that members need additional time to provide that guidance.

Julia Campbell stated that she had read the editorial and she took it as an attack that the Committee is not doing enough or doesn't care about children's safety or air quality and it almost seemed like a campaign and it felt combative. She stated that she thought it was inappropriate but doesn't know how to best go forward. She stated that to her the protocols and district goals are the ways we can be more unified in process even if not unified in votes.

Dana Allara asked Superintendent Tracy to share what MASS said about this issue.

Superintendent Tracy stated that MASS had concerns regarding creating a petition directed at the Committee for a budget allocation while we are already in the middle of a difficult budget process.

Dana Allara stated that MASC confirmed that for members their voice is here at the table. In the budget process each member has a voice in the process so her concern was in going outside that process to direct other people to create a petition for this.

David Frenkel stated that direct may be too strong a word.

Amy Kunberger stated that at the end of David Frenkel's letter, it did say to visit the petition and sign it.

Dana Allara stated that at the top of the petition the target is listed as the Hamilton-Wenham School Committee.

David Frenkel agreed that was the intent and he stated that Julia Campbell is correct, it is a portion of a campaign to persuade you to think otherwise.

Dana Allara stated that what MASC said is your ability to persuade us is that you have a seat at the table here and if the vote doesn't go your way, just as with all of us, that is on you that you didn't persuade us.

Jen Carr stated that it was before your tenure but we had a few contentious years where School Committee members and their children were receiving threats and those threats caused people to amp up their security. She stated that as a person who received one of those threats she does not appreciate being called out on an issue and targeted, which is what she felt David Frenkel did in the letter.

David Frenkel stated that he had no intention to target you for abuse or violence but rather just to encourage you to revisit something that you particularly have said should never be revisited in statements of great finality which statements he thinks are completely inappropriate.

Trent Honda stated Dana Allara was asking for operational guidance and given the conversation wonders if there is operational guidance or if this is something that the Committee wants to think about and discuss further at a later date.

Dana Allara stated that she agrees that the Committee may need more time.

At 7:23 p.m. David Frenkel moved to adjourn. There was no second to the motion.

Amy Kunberger requested that this item be added to a future meeting agenda. She stated that she does not want Dana Allara, as Chair, to feel overwhelmed or overworked by this issue.

Dana Allara stated that she is not feeling overwhelmed or overworked and is looking for guidance from the Committee on how best to handle these issues going forward.

David Polito stated that in his experience he found it most helpful to bring these types of issues to the full Committee for resolution.

David Frenkel stated that if this topic is being added to a future meeting agenda he would request that all allegations be put in writing so he can respond because he believes Dana Allara has misled the Committee.

Dana Allara stated the Committee would take five minutes to clarify where she has misled the Committee. Dana Allara and David Frenkel briefly discussed the issues to no resolution and David Polito stated that the minutes of the meeting will provide the requested documentation.

7. Adjourn

I move to adjourn at 8:31 p.m.

Motion by: David Polito **Seconded by: David Frenkel**

ROLL CALL VOTE MOTION PASSED 6-1 (Members Allara, Campbell, Frenkel, Honda, Kunberger and Polito voted yes and Member Carr voted no)