



Joint East Greenwich School Committee - Town Council Meeting

Monday, February 10, 2025

Hybrid Meeting: Swift Community Center & Via Zoom

Minutes

Those in attendance

School Committee: Ms. Alyson Powell, Chair; Dr. Eugene Quinn, Vice-Chair; Ms. Clare Cecil-Karb; Mr. William Hangan, Mr. Kevin Wright

Absent: Ms. Melissa Larsen; Mr. Tim Munoz

Additional Attendees: Dr. Brian G. Ricca, Superintendent; Ms. Sarah Courtemanche-O'Brien, Assistant Superintendent; Mrs. Maggie Baker, Director of Administration; Mrs. Amy Healey, School Committee Clerk; Mr. Neil Marcaccio, Director of Student Services

Town Council: Mr. Michael Donegan, Vice President; Ms. Caryn Corenthal; Ms. Renu Englehart; Mr. Michael Zarrella

Absent: Mr. Mark Schwager, President

Additional Attendees: Mr. Andrew Nota, Town Manager; Ms Leigh Carney, Town Clerk; Ms. Trish Sunderland, Town Finance Director

- I. **5:00 pm - Introduction to the Rhode Island Ethics Commission and the Code of Ethics**
- II. **Recess**
- III. **6:30 pm - Call to Order and Pledge of Allegiance**

At 6:37 pm Mr. Donegan called the Town Council meeting to order and Ms. Powell called the School Committee meeting to order.

IV. Joint Meeting with Town Council

- A. Pre-budget meeting between School Committee and Town Council; to present estimate of revenues FY 26 and School to present estimate of total expenditures, projected enrollments, with resultant staff and facility requirements and any necessary or mandated changes in school programs or operations per RIGL 16-2-21.

East Greenwich Public Schools, Superintendent Brian Ricca & Mrs. Baker

Dr. Ricca began by explaining that the Governor's proposed budget reduces East Greenwich's state aid by \$842,000. This cut comes as EG had the greatest rise in median income in the state; a ratio of 191%. The State took a portion of EG's state aid and is allocating it to other communities. Last week Ralph Mollis stated at a group meeting that this reduction to East Greenwich is a red flag. EG did not receive much money from the three rounds of ESSER money and ESSER money is now going away. The District has been spending down its fund balance. There will not be a simple way to make up this shortfall.

- EGPS budget process
 - Key milestones
- Key variables in the development of EGPS budget
 - Collective bargaining agreements; health insurance costs; state aid to education; federal grants/programs; student enrollment; special education costs; charter and career & tech school costs; transportation costs; unfunded legislative mandates; aging infrastructure; fund balance; town revenues
- EGPS FY 25 budget projections
 - Variance Notes
 - Multiple unfilled positions
 - Unfilled positions also reduce benefit expenses
 - Increase in hired contracted service
 - Hired maintenance contracted services
 - Additional out of district students
 - Increase in utility expenses
 - Additional legal settlement
- EGPS FY 26 governor proposed state aid
- EGPS Strategic Plan
- EGPS FY 26 considerations
- EGPS FY 25 Budget Projections
- Projected FY 26 State Aid - East Greenwich - decrease of \$827,121 from FY 25
- The Story of the FY 26 Budget, Related to the Strategic Plan
- The Story of the FY 26 Budget
 - Framing the future
 - Innovating Implementation

- Social Emotional Health
 - Community Partnerships
- East Greenwich Public Schools Budgeted Revenue FY 25
- East Greenwich Public School Enrollment
- Factors that influence enrollment and budget planning
 - Home School Students
 - Career & Tech Students
 - Charter School Students

Mr. Donegan pointed out that the FY 25 Approved Budget and Year End Projections show a savings of nearly \$200,000. However, the numbers presented actually show projections of \$1.7 million over budget.

Mrs. Baker apologized for a typo and reiterated that the year end projections are approximately \$200,000 under budget. Mrs. Baker said that this is not a surplus but will offset the money coming from fund balance.

Ms. Englehart inquired about the purchased property services line. Mrs. Baker explained that this includes utilities, pest control, HVAC maintenance, plumbing, glass repair, equipment rental, etc.

Ms. Englehart inquired about other purchased services. Mrs. Baker said this includes out of district students such as special education outplacement, charter schools, CTE students.

Ms. Englehart inquired about the cost of special education outplacements. Mr. Marcaccio explained those costs and what services the district receives reimbursement for. Ms. Englehart asked for a breakdown of these expenses and revenue from medicare.

Town Council members asked about CTE programs. Dr. Page, EGHS Principal, explained how CTE programs work; both students leaving EG for other programs and students coming to EGHS. The District can not prevent students from going to other district's programs unless the program is not substantially different than one offered at EGHS. Dr. Ricca explained that he is working with other districts to address losing students to similar programs. Mr. Marcaccio said that there are significant transportation costs when students go out of the district. Dr. Ricca said that there is a statewide study on transportation costs.

Ms. Powell explained that the School Committee reached out to General Assembly representatives with concerns about transportation costs and state aid matters.

Ms. Corenthal asked what the School Department is doing to advocate for more money and address the budget shortfalls. She noted that the salary steps are low in comparison to other districts.

Dr. Ricca emphasized the need to retain the staff that the District has.

Mr. Zarrella acknowledged that there are large reductions in money from the State and the Federal government. The burden of financing will fall on the Town. The money for the new schools should be shifted to teachers. He advocated for the reduction of the school building bond.

Mr. Donergan discussed the flaws in state aid to education. He asserted that the state balanced its budget by putting expenses back on the communities. The State has used COVID funds on recurring expenditures instead of one time expenses.

Town Council members asked for better projections on revenues and asserted that some of the line items are inflated.

Mrs. Baker explained that the school department budget is constantly changing due to multiple variables.

Ms. Corenthal said that the school budget has been consistently wrong and the Council needs to see good, correct budgeting from the schools.

Dr. Quinn asserted that a good school budget should come within a couple hundred thousand dollars.

Ms. Powell stated that the School Committee is equally committed to having a balanced budget.

Town of East Greenwich, Town Manager Andrew Nota

Mr. Nota said that we are going into a very challenging budget time and we must recognize that the state aid reduction could get worse for East Greenwich. Significant changes are needed because the way things are going is not working. He said that the Town has 50 or so questions about the school district's budget.

Mr. Nota said that he is working on increasing efficiency and looking to not hire additional employees. There are still services that belong in the school budget but continue to be paid by the Town. He continues to work on moving those expenses to the schools but will likely hold off this year due to budget concerns.

2025 Budgetary Projections

- Revenues
 - Levy trend 2025 vs 2024
 - Collection Projections
 - Estimate Budgetary Surplus - est. \$1.4 million
- Expenditures
 - Transfer of \$515,000 to Capital Reserves
 - Fund Balance - \$500,000
- FY 2026 - Intergovernmental Aid
 - State Aid to Education
 - Municipal State Aid
 - School Construction Aid
- FY 2026 - Aid and other budgetary impacts
- School Fund Balance / State Aid / Total Budget and Tax Transfer Trending
- Statistical Profile - Tax Growth
- Current Outstanding Debt
- Future Debt Service Cost Schedule
- Debt Service Required Property Tax Need
- 2026 Six Year Capital Improvement Program
- Projected Bonding Projects
- Estimated Property Tax Related to Debt Service
- General Fund Unassigned Fund Balance

Ms. Sutherland explained that the importance of fund balance is in relation to the bond rating systems. The fund balance is available for emergency purposes; a one time expenditure for the schools or the town. A higher bond rating will yield lower interest rates.

There was agreement between both bodies that it is important to have a presence at the State House.

B. Public Comments (related to Item IV. A.)

Renee Haskins, EG resident and EGPS teacher

Ms. Haskins said teachers have begun advocating at the State House. She said that this community needs to continue to fulfill its obligation of free and appropriate public education for all children. We can not provide excellence education when we have one of the lowest per pupil expenditure rates and teacher salaries. She advocated for the Town to understand what it is to work in public education and to work collaboratively.

V. Adjournment

On a motion by Ms. Cecil-Karb, seconded by Mr. Hangan, the Committee voted 5-0 to adjourn the meeting at 8:42 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Amy J. Healey
School Committee Clerk

Approved 3-4-25