

WHITMAN-HANSON REGIONAL SCHOOL COMMITTEE RE-ORGANIZATIONAL MEETING  
Minutes of June 12, 2017  
Held at the Whitman-Hanson Regional High School

Meeting convened: 7:00 p.m.

Meeting adjourned: 8:30 p.m.

Members present: Robert Hayes, Frederick Small, Daniel Cullity, Robert Trotta, Kevin Lynam, Christopher Howard, Michael Jones, and Alexandria Taylor

Members absent: Robert O'Brien, Jr. and Steve Bois

Administrators present: Dr. Ruth Gilbert-Whitner, Superintendent of Schools  
Dr. Patrick Dillon, Assistant Superintendent of Schools  
Christine Suckow, Director of Business Services  
Kyle Riley, Administrator for Special Education and Pupil Personnel

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School Committee Chair, Robert Hayes, convened the Joint Meeting of the School Committee and Town Officials at 7:00 pm. And stated to meeting was being recorded and broadcast live.

**INTRODUCTIONS**

All attendees at the meeting introduced themselves. Community members, parents and several Whitman-Hanson Regional School District staff were in attendance. The following appointed town officials were also present:

**Town of Whitman:**

Town Administrator Frank Lynam  
Board of Selectmen Chair, Carl Kowalski  
Finance Committee Member, Shawn Kain

**Town of Hanson:**

Board of Selectmen Chair, James McGahan  
Finance Committee Chair, Michael Dugan  
Finance Committee Member, Amy Wright  
State Representative, Josh Cutler  
Staffer for State Representative Geoff Diehl, David Walsh

**PURPOSE OF SPECIAL MEETING**

Bob Hayes, the School Committee Chair, announced he is facilitating the joint meeting of the School Committee and town officials from Hanson and Whitman to explore budget considerations for the upcoming fiscal year. The group discussed the budget process of years past and opportunities to enhance the process for the upcoming budget season. In addition, the School Committee is seeking input and is interested in listening to the concerns of the budget from the town officials and community members in an effort to help strategize and move the budget process forward, not only for the school district, but for the towns of Whitman and Hanson.

**DISCUSSION**

Differentiating budget process timelines between the school district, towns and state were identified. Also discussed where the financial difficulties in generating revenue and addressing increases in expenditures.

Mike Duggan, Hanson Finance Committee Chair, spoke to concerns with revenue and supporting all of the departments within the town. The budget process in Hanson looks to prioritize items, review stable accounts, identify unanticipated items and find opportunities for additional revenue sources. Expiring grants for the school district and filling those holes with new sources of revenue was also discussed. Mr. Duggan suggested reviewing anticipated enrollment early on and identifying and changes to the 60/40 split between the towns.

Frank Lynam, Whitman Town Administrator, commented that the division in the assessments to the towns, based on enrollment, is big factor. Whitman has done preliminary budgeting and factored increases in property, new growth, etc. and has already requested information from the assessor's office for FY2019 estimates. The question being how much of the town budget must be allotted to the school district budget line.

There was a discussion of commencing school district budget meetings earlier than January to identify areas of concern and determine gross estimates at the start of school in September. Several School Committee members offered their recommendations to determine supportable estimates based on history and support and work together as a group to meet that goal. Opportunities to increase revenue sources was the topic, rather than cutting from other town departments. Suggestions of developing an override to meet the revenue gap were also deliberated, although some feel that type of funding may be unsustainable. School Committee members discussed meeting the state's determination of target share for each town and working with the towns to meet the target. Mr. Cullity noted the creative financing the school district does each year to support the reduction in local and state funding and reduced federal grant funding annually.

Jim McGahan, Hanson Board of Selectmen Chair, suggested developing new ideas for revenue sources and perhaps hiring a professional grant writer. Dr. Whitner explained that grant funding is 'soft money' and opportunities are temporary and not always sustainable. Furthermore, the demographics within the two towns are not ideal for attracting grant funding. The Superintendent explained how the Whitman-Hanson Regional School District partners with other school districts and collaboratives to generate revenue in the form of grants.

Representative Josh Cutler commented that many towns face the same challenges. In addition, this community receives a higher percentage of revenue from the state, than other area school districts. However, the state revenues are not meeting their benchmarks either. Representative Cutler also discussed new revenue generated from the new marijuana laws and the Fair Share amendment sur-tax on state income tax. He does not anticipate any changes in Chapter 70 funding because student enrollment is flat. Representative Cutler added he does not envision any modest increase in state aid in general.

Other discussions continued about how to generate additional revenue. Comments included that the towns do not attract much commercial business. Regulations restricting charging families for student bus transportation were also identified. State mandates that are either unfunded or partially funded were discussed. It was noted that special education costs are not adequately funded at state and federal levels.

Mr. Trotta added his vision of the towns and schools working together to establish a tangible goal for proper funding. The WHRSD Strategic Plan identifies priorities and tasks and is used during the budget process. Chair Hayes added that the budget information should be supplied by the towns early on as well. Beth Stafford, from WHEA, suggested overrides and other revenue opportunities would be more apt to pass at town meetings if the towns and school district presented in a united front, together with their needs prioritized and long term solutions. It was noted that there are several moving targets when budgeting that include salaries and health insurance costs. Community members and parents spoke to student teacher ratios. The Superintendent discussed Whitman-Hanson's very low placement on the

Massachusetts school district per pupil expenditure report (seventh from the bottom) and the need to rectify that placement. It was also noted 85% of the state's school districts offer tuition-free full day kindergarten; however, Whitman and Hanson do not. The Superintendent provided a brief history in local and state funding for the Whitman-Hanson Regional School District. She added that if the trajectory stayed at the same level of 4-5% annually since 2005, the current district budget would be \$60 million and not \$48 million. Whitman parent, Chris George, suggested educating taxpayers on what is required financially to operate a town and build the message about the revenue issues to fix the problem.

In closing, the discussion to move forward in a positive direction must be comprised of community involvement, educating taxpayers, and working together to identify needs and priorities to establish a sustainable budget. Plans to regularly meet and review projections and expenditures with the School District Business Office and Town Finance Committees over the next several months were discussed.

**NEXT MEETING DATE**

A tentative meeting date of September 11, 2017 was discussed.

**VOTE: Mrs. Taylor motioned; Mr. Cullity; seconded; roll call voted to adjourn the meeting at 8:30 p.m. The motion carried unanimously.**

Minutes respectfully submitted Michelle Lindberg

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Handouts:

- 1) Meeting Agenda for June 12, 2017