

WHITMAN-HANSON REGIONAL SCHOOL COMMITTEE MEETING

Minutes of April 24, 2019

Held at the Whitman-Hanson Regional High School
600 Franklin Street, Whitman MA

Meeting convened: 7:00 p.m.

Meeting adjourned: 8:31 p.m.

Members present: Robert Hayes, Frederick Small, Robert O'Brien, Jr., Michael Jones, Daniel Cullity, Christopher Scriven, Alexandria Taylor, Christopher Howard and Steve Bois

Members absent: Robert Trotta

Administrators present: Jeffrey Szymaniak, Superintendent of Schools
George M. Ferro, Jr., Assistant Superintendent of Schools

Chair Hayes brought the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m. and announced the meeting was being recorded and broadcast live.

Superintendent's Report

FY2020 Budget Discussion

Superintendent Szymaniak provided the Committee with an updated local assessment schedule reflecting the School Committee's vote to transfer \$561,237 out of the Excess and Deficiency (E&D) Account. The transfer and recent decrease in operating costs of \$292,000 represents a total reduction of \$853,237 to the original proposed FY2020 operating budget.

Mr. Szymaniak presented budget impact sheet, based on tiered local assessment figures. At a 12.5% local assessment increase, there will be no position cuts. Mr. Szymaniak reported there have also been recent unanticipated resignations and retirements. At a local assessment increase of 6.5%, a number of positions will be cut.

Superintendent Szymaniak reported he delivered over 60 Reduction in Force (RIF) notices to non-tenured teaching staff prior to the April school vacation recess.

Chair Hayes invited town officials to speak on their budget positions for the local assessment. Whitman Finance Committee, Rick Anderson reported on the methodology used by the Whitman Finance Committee in preparing town budgets. Several budget scenarios were built, both with and without a Proposition 2 ½ % override and debt exclusion. Mr. Anderson spoke to working with all departments and the Board of Selectmen to develop a budget cycle and five year plan. Mr. Anderson reported the Whitman Finance Committee budgeted \$14,398,151 in the Town of Whitman Warrant Article 2, line item 175 school budget, supporting an 8.5% local assessment increase. Mr. Anderson confirmed non-union employees in other town departments conceded to a 1% salary decrease (from 2%). Mr. Anderson requested the School Committee consider regulating salaries in the next round of collecting bargaining with Whitman Hanson Education Association union. Mr. Anderson announced the Whitman Finance Committee is in support of seeking to override Proposition 2½ property tax in the fall. Mr. Anderson reported the Finance Committee created Line Item 178 of Article 2 from \$397,604 to \$173,471 as an option to reduce non-mandating bussing costs and institute a pay as you go plan. Mr. Szymaniak explained reducing non-mandated bussing will have a financial impact on the District's First Student transportation contract. In addition, some families may not be

able to afford a “pay as you go” program. Mr. Szymaniak reported he is concerned with staff reductions to teachers and paraprofessionals. Although one to one teacher’s aides for students on Individualized Education Plans (IEP’s) will remain whole, instructional paraprofessional resignations and retirements may not be replaced and lost to attrition.

Whitman Town Administrator, Frank Lynam, discussed working hard to come up with an appropriation that works fiscally. Mr. Lynam reported the Whitman Board of Selectmen is recommending supporting a 6.5% local assessment increase while the Finance Committee supports 8.5%. However, there is a Board of Selectmen’s meeting scheduled for Tuesday, April 31 as well as a Finance Committee meeting. Mr. Lynam reported the Town does intend to seek an override in the fall, and if successful, will be an all-inclusive request and will recognize future needs for capital and town departments including the schools. Mr. Lynam spoke to staying focused on developing a sustainable model for our budget which will cause some stress for the school system. Budget growth does not reflect revenue needed and Chapter 70 is low and is not supportable.

Mr. Szymaniak reported an 8.5% local assessment increase translates to a 3.6% increase to the school district budget and creates a deficit of \$897,000 to the proposed level service budget. The total cut to the level services budget is \$1,757,480 or a 3% cut to level services. Mr. Szymaniak explained the inequity in budget increases/decreases to other town departments. Mr. Szymaniak reported that unfunded and under-funded mandates costs and special education costs are currently being reviewed by the state legislature. The Superintendent reported the math and ELA curriculum plans are in place for next year. Mr. Szymaniak was hesitant to open recently settled collective bargaining contracts if the towns are not as well.

Hanson Town Administrator, Mike McCue stated he did not have much to add but that the Hanson Board of Selectmen and Finance Committee both voted to support a 6.5% assessment increase. He added work needs to be done in the coming year for sustainability. Mr. McCue reported the Board of Selectmen meet on Tuesday, April 31, to review warrant but not to discuss the school assessment.

Chair Hayes announced the current local assessment status is at 12.5% increase as voted by the School Committee. Mr. Small requested the School Committee meet again on May 1, after the Boards of Selectmen in each town meet on April 31. Mr. Small also reported that House Representative Josh Cutler’s per pupil minimum now sits at \$30, that he (Mr. Small) is in discussion with Senator Michael Brady for educational funding support and that regional transportation reimbursement is up to 89% in the house budget. Mr. Small questioned if the towns could support an 8.5% assessment increase. The Committee members discussed supporting a level services budget. Mr. Small motioned to amend the local assessment from 12.5% to 8.5%. Mr. Bois seconded. Mrs. Taylor stated she will not support anything less than 12.5% for level services.

Mr. Szymaniak reported the impact of an 8.5% assessment increase will be an \$897,511 deficit in the proposed level services budget and will directly impact staffing. Assistant Superintendent, George Ferro, reported that the district would eliminate 26 people at 6.5% local assessment and 19 people at 8.5%. Positions impacted are elementary, middle and high school teachers, paraprofessionals including duty aides, central office, facilities and technology personnel will be cut as well as a part-time elementary music teacher. Mr. Ferro added he is challenged as an administrator and as a citizen of Whitman at the constant struggle in funding education. Mike Jones noted his frustration in no cuts in any other town departments. Mr. Lynam confirmed one recommendation in Whitman is to move a full-time position to part-time and added that a reduced budget will eliminate significant coverage for first responders. Mr. McCue reported Hanson is not contemplating any cuts but that most departments are already minimally staffed.

Mr. Howard discussed the challenge and lack of understanding the budget versus the local assessment. The proposed budget is a 3.6% increase, not an increase of 12.5%. In order to meet the proposed budget without personnel cuts, a 12.5% local assessment increase is required. Superintendent Szymaniak indicated he will

always consider class size in the budget. The Administration is looking at systems reductions, restructuring, and maintaining appropriate curriculum for next year. There was continued discussion of the importance of a modern-day education for students, equitable funding for all town departments, challenges with the steep rising of special education costs and limited and eliminated education offerings in Whitman and Hanson. The School Committee also understands the limited funding resources at the local level.

Mr. Small withdrew his motion to amend the local assessment to 8.5%. Mr. Bois withdrew his second.

VOTE: Mr. Small motioned; Mr. Cullity seconded; voted to table the budget discussion on the local assessment until a School Committee meeting can be held on May 1, 2019. The motion passed unanimously.

After continued deliberation, Mr. Small motioned once again to amend the local assessment to 8.5% and the motion was seconded by Mr. Bois.

VOTE: Mr. Small motioned; Mr. Bois seconded; voted to amend the local assessment increase from 12.5% to 8.5%, as discussed. The motion failed 1-8-0.

The Committee discussed budget equity between all town departments and the non-controversial assessment for the South Shore Vocational Technical School. Mr. Szymaniak reported there are six staff retirements and four staff resignations to date. Mr. O'Brien motioned to amend the local assessment to 10.5% and the motion was seconded by Mr. Jones. Mr. Bois specified a 10.5% local assessment would still be a \$453,841 budget deficit. Mr. Szymaniak confirmed that at a 10.5% local assessment, eleven positions will be cut. Mr. Small added that it is possible the District may receive unanticipated revenue once the final state budget is determined.

VOTE: Mr. O'Brien motioned; Mr. Jones seconded; voted to amend the local assessment increase from 12.5% to 10.5%, as discussed. The motion failed 5-4-0.

Mr. Small motioned for the third time to amend the local assessment to 8.5% and the motion was seconded by Mr. Bois.

VOTE: Mr. Small motioned; Mr. Bois seconded; voted to amend the local assessment increase from 12.5% to 8.5%, as discussed. The motion failed 1-8-0.

Warrant Signings

The following Warrants were signed:

042419AP	\$856,518.17
P42519	\$1,203,138.26

Meeting Adjournment

VOTE: Mr. Cullity motioned; Mr. Small seconded; voted to adjourn the meeting at 8:31 p.m. The motion carried unanimously.

Minutes respectfully submitted by Michelle Lindberg

Signature of School Committee Secretary

Meeting Handouts:

- Meeting agenda for April 24, 2019
- Copy of tiered local assessment schedule
- Copy of tiered budget implications