

## MINUTES OF WESTON SCHOOL COMMITTEE MEETING

Woodland School

January 27, 2020

A meeting of the Weston School Committee was called to order at 4:01 PM at Woodland School by Mr. John Henry, Chair. In attendance were Mrs. Danielle Black, Mr. Alex Cobb, Ms. Anita Raman, and Mrs. Rachel Stewart of the Weston School Committee; Dr. Midge Connolly, Superintendent; Dr. Kimo Carter, Assistant Superintendent for Teaching and Learning; and Ms. Sheri Matthews, Assistant Superintendent for Finance and Operations.

Also present were Town Manager Mr. Leon Gaumont; Finance Committee members Ms. Lisa Reitano, Mr. John Sallay, Mr. John MacDonald, and Mr. Bharath Venkataraman; Dr. Lee McCanne, Director of Technology and School Libraries; Mr. Anthony Parker, Weston High School Principal; Mr. John Gibbons, Weston Middle School Principal; Mr. Gary Jarobski, Director of Facilities; Mr. Christopher Fehl, Director of Visual Arts; and Ms. Marla Schay, Grade 6-12 Guidance Department Head.

Mr. Henry welcomed everyone, introduced members of the School Committee and Administration, and reviewed the agenda. Mr. Henry spoke about the budget process and requested audience members who wish to speak on a particular topic wait until after the relevant budget area has been presented and that speaking time be limited to five minutes. Mr. Henry suggested people read the statement available online that he presented on the budget.

Mr. Henry read a statement about this year's budget process, noting reductions proposed due to declining enrollment, and indicated that the School Committee feels deeply about reducing employees. He said that staffing has increased during the past many years while enrollment has declined and indicated that there are 35 classes this year with fewer than 15 students. Mr. Henry's statement addressed some of the questions raised by faculty regarding class size. He noted that the quality of teaching has more impact than class size and most class sizes, even with the proposed reduction in FTEs, will be at around 20 students per class, with none greater than 24. Mr. Henry indicated that the School Committee is comfortable with the budget proposed by the administration and with the reduction in FTEs across disciplines. He noted they will closely monitor class sizes and will always be supportive of adding sections when needed. Mr. Henry indicated that in addition to proposed secondary school FTE reductions, there are across the district reductions in support staff and elimination of the Out-of-District Coordinator.

### Budget Review

The School Committee conducted initial review of the proposed FY21 Budgets for High School, Middle School, Technology, and Operations (Buildings and Grounds, Utilities, Transportation).

Middle School -- Mr. Gibbons shared highlights from the past year's budget, including the renovation of the last two science classrooms, adoption of Chromebooks in Grade 7, new online science textbooks, Responsive Classroom Training, implementation of the Student Advisory Program, and the purchase of ping pong tables. He reported a proposed reduction of one section in Grade 8, but would monitor enrollment closely, and reductions of one clerical aide and one learning assistant. He noted the section reduction necessitates the loss of some new, excellent teachers. Mr. Gibbons mentioned budget items for future consideration, including the replacement of furniture and carpeting in the APC and redesign of the library to bring to modern standard. Brief discussion took place regarding the reliability of predicted enrollment, which Mrs. Black noted the Committee will continue to monitor during the summer.

High School -- Mr. Parker shared a copy of a *New York Times* ad which features two Weston students. He reported that the high school will have a 6.0 reduction in FTE across all disciplines except History, which will be further determined by sign-ups that take place in February. He noted that initial proposed reductions are .825 in English, 1.0 in Math, .5 in Science, .5 in World Language, .5 in Wellness, .3 in Art, .15 in Music, and .5 in Special Education. Dr. Connolly noted there was much flexibility in the numbers to support students and to allow movement. Mr. Fehl spoke about the proposed .3 reduction in art, noting that the faculty member facing the reduction would be Jake Ginga, elementary art teacher,

*Approved by School Committee 2.10.20*

even though the reductions are at secondary level. Mr. Fehl noted that Mr. Ginga was named Massachusetts Art Educator of the Year and his leaving would be a great loss to the district. Mr. Fehl requested the Committee consider not reducing art by .3, noting that there are one or two members of the department who will likely retire this year or next. Many parents spoke in support of Mr. Ginga and of the visual arts in general. Mr. David Poras, Weston Education Association President, indicated that Mr. Ginga is the only member of the Art Department without Professional Teacher Status and is therefore the one who would face any reduction.

Ms. Schay expressed concern about limiting student options if three sections of art are eliminated at high school and would have a diminished return. Mr. Henry requested Ms. Schay might have data she could share. Mrs. Stewart noted her son faced this problem this year and has many free periods now. She asked if Ms. Schay might provide data on the number of study periods students have. There was much discussion among the Committee and audience members, regarding the impact of proposed cuts on student options and class size. Ms. Reitano spoke about the budget from the Town perspective, noting that less than a third of homeowners have children in the schools, Weston taxes are highest per household in the state, two thirds of the Town budget is for the schools, there is a decline in enrollment, and there needs to be a reduction in order to have Town Meeting support of the budget.

Mr. Henry noted that Weston has a liberal add/drop policy and indicated that the current high school schedule and eight-day rotation are areas to be reviewed once a new administration is in place. He thanked everyone for a respectful discussion.

Technology -- Dr. McCanne presented Capital Requests for replacement of switching and wireless network infrastructure, noting that current wireless systems are outdated and won't support our devices. He indicated that copper cabling and fiber need to be replaced to support faster speeds, and the need for more security against external threats. He noted there are 1,100-1,300 people connected to our network. Dr. McCanne indicated that regarding devices, we have been maintaining our core environment and noted we are in year 5 of 5 in the E-rate program, with a rate of \$150/student for five years. He said we now have \$249,000 in E-rate reimbursements to leverage with a reimbursement rate of 30%, although the exact number will not be known until mid-March, prior to Town Meeting. Mr. Cobb indicated there has been thought about bonding over 10-15 years for equipment and requested Dr. McCanne find out what has been spent and when.

Dr. McCanne presented proposed security measures to be undertaken, including securing front entrance at Country School and the High School breezeway, communication system security, and cellular enhancements. He discussed an offer by Verizon to partner with us in enhancing the cell network. Mr. Gaumond noted that Cybersecurity is an area where municipal governments have been exposed in recent years and applauds the steps being taken to improve our infrastructure. He noted the Town has a capital plan but that this was not on the Town's radar and was unaware. He indicated that 1.1 million dollars is a significant portion of the Town's free cash and said, if it was on the school radar screen, it needs to be communicated on the town side. Dr. McCanne noted he did not connect school-side and town-side. Discussion took place regarding the 1.1 million dollar capital request, with Mr. Gaumond noting they have to balance all of the needs of the Town. He asked if it could be done in phases. Dr. Connolly suggested work with Verizon can help with costs, and Mr. Henry said the schools would work to coordinate the 5-year plan with the Town.

Mrs. Black asked Dr. McCanne to discuss proposed technology fees, noting fees are a change. Dr. McCanne said the operational budget includes replacement of elementary Chromebooks, language lab, art lab, and replacement of Classroom AV systems when older systems need replacement. He indicated they decided to drop some labs and delay Mac mini classroom computers and was proposing a \$100-\$150 technology fee to continue the 1:1 Chromebook program at Middle School, where at the end of eighth grade, parents would receive the device. Parents would pay for Chromebook, case and insurance. There was much discussion regarding this. Dr. McCanne said this would be preferred over bring your own device because of the maturity level of children and to manage the device for MCAS testing. Ms. Raman asked if parents would want the device after three years. Mrs. Stewart asked about the leasing option. Dr.

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McCanne said we are purchasing and charging the parents; but noted no cost difference. Mr. Venkataraman of the Finance Committee suggested the devices are a core part of instruction and questioned charging parents the fee. Mr. Henry noted that traditionally Weston has not charged fees and thought this was a responsible way to chip away at the growth items in the budget. He noted other districts typically do charge fees. Mrs. Black said the offset for the fees needs to be shown.

Mr. Venkataraman noted that the current infrastructure systems are old but okay and suggested updating the infrastructure, but not the routers and to invest enough in security, but not too much, because 5G might disrupt much. The Committee discussed the software licenses for high school labs. Dr. McCanne noted the software licensing is departmental, while Technology budget includes hardware.

### Operations

Facilities – Mr. Jarowski noted he is responsible for all capital projects for both Town and School and indicated completion of the Weston Innovation Center, near completion of Case House, and the Tavern as the next major project. He said the budget has been leveled for the past two years. Mr. Jarowski said the new position of capital project manager has been very helpful and saves money, especially in the case of in-house renovation work like the science classrooms completed in sections.

Mr. Jarowski said two new projects are being proposed, roof for F wing at the high school, which is at the end of its life expectancy, and Middle school RTU air conditioning unit, which is 30 years old and breaking down quite a bit. He said they are currently evaluating other schools' air conditioning units (except Field). Ms. Matthews noted a State of Interest would be submitted to the MSBA for funding. Mr. Jarowski said they also want to upgrade single glazed windows at Woodland and Middle Schools and to begin looking at some of the computerized systems, such as fire alarms, as they get outdated. He indicated they are working with the new Sustainability Committee to apply for a grant for LED lighting. Ms. Matthews reported that solar credits, previously in school budget, will now be shown in the Town overall budget. She also indicated there are budget increases in natural gas and electricity, based on last year's actuals, and anticipates an increase of utilities at Case House as we move back in.

### Transportation –:

Ms. Matthews reported that the proposed budget includes replacement of three new buses, which will be gasoline buses with seat belts. She indicated there is now a 3% surcharge due to tariffs on steel and aluminum, which causes a 4% increase. Ms. Matthews noted there will be offsets from Wayland for transportation we provide to Minuteman and reported that the METCO grant is lower. She also indicated that we are short two bus drivers and are continuing to hire bus drivers and bus monitors.

No action taken on the budget.

### Open Meeting Law complaints

Mr. Henry informed the Committee the OML complaints and the responses of the Attorney General. He noted the Attorney General wanted more discussion detail in the executive session notes and said there is a five-minute video that all school committee members need to watch. Mr. Henry said the Committee has never acted on major business in executive session and strives to do everything in open session. He noted the primary reason for executive session has been for collective bargaining discussions. No action taken.

### Approval of Minutes

MOTION: Upon motion made by Mrs. Black and seconded by Mrs. Stewart, the School Committee voted unanimously to approve the minutes of May 10, 2018; May 2, 2019; and January 13, 2020.

### Approval of Warrant

Ms. Matthews presented a Certificate of the Secretary, approval of warrants for payment.

MOTION: Upon motion made by Mr. Cobb and seconded by Mrs. Black, the School Committee voted unanimously to approve the warrant for payment of \$1,888,140.83 by the Assistant Superintendent for Finance and Operations.

Adjournment

MOTION: Upon motion made by Mrs. Black and seconded by Mr. Cobb, the School Committee voted unanimously to adjourn at 6:37 PM.