

Westwood Finance and Warrant Commission
February 10, 2015
Library
Meeting Minutes

Chairman LeBlanc Cummings called the meeting to order at 7:35 P.M.

Finance and Warrant Commission members absent: Paul Bierden, Craig Foscaldo, George Hertz, Tom Looney.

FY16 School Budget Update

Present at tonight's meeting were the following:

Superintendent John Antonucci
Business and Finance Director Heath Petracca
School Committee Chair Carol Lewis and Members Charles Donahue,
Josepha Jowdy and John O'Brien
Other staff

Superintendent Antonucci had previously provided Fincom members a copy of the executive summary portion of his recommended FY16 budget. Tonight John distributed a condensed version of that summary and provided verbal comments, some of which included:

- The FY16 school budget increase is 5.89% or \$2.2M – higher than recent years.
- An annual increase in the 5% range is what the School department would need to maintain services.
- The School budget has been conservative in recent years and now there is a need to address certain components of the budget.
- An FY16 significant reduction in State circuit breaker reimbursement is anticipated.
- This was a difficult budget season, having to provide for fixed and mandated increases.
- Abby Hanscom, SPED Director, explained the “McKinney-Vento” Homeless Assistance Act of 2001 which provides certain rights for homeless preschool-aged and school-aged children. Currently some children (estimate of 25) who are protected under this law are housed at a Route 1 motel in Westwood. This year the School Department has provided the required school transportation for these children; the current, FY15 costs for this transportation will be included as an Article 1 supplemental transfer request at the May Town Meeting.

Some Fincom member comments/questions:

- How will the School Department handle the impact of additional school children (if any) from the University Station project?
 - Difficult to say until the housing is completed; initial impact studies indicated an insignificant number of school aged children would occupy the housing. If that is the case, the School Department could handle.
- Are there adequate fees charged for use of the School facilities?
 - A significant amount is collected from fees; we will look at whether increases are in order; however, most of the groups using the facilities are Town affiliated.

- Several members had questions regarding class size and SPED transportation.
 - Chairman LeBlanc Cummings stated the Fincom tries to determine what is of most concern to residents; i.e., the Fincom’s role recently to increase Fire Department staffing. Attention should now be paid to school class size, particularly since the Town will be experiencing new growth and additional new funds will come to the Town from the University Station project.
- How would school consolidation affect the budget?
 - The School Department has hired an architect to do a capital needs study. Although consolidation would smooth out the impact of class size fluctuations, actual savings from consolidation is difficult to quantify.
- What is the School Department’s process for identifying capital needs?
 - The School Department prepares and submits a five-year capital plan which is subsequently incorporated with the municipal requests into a final five year inclusive capital document.
 - There are details on the roofing and furniture, fixture, and equipment (FF&E) requests.
- There are insufficient funds devoted to energy conservation.
 - The School Department is allocated a specific capital amount.....we seek all available grant funds.
- Suggestion to consider using some of the University Station mitigation funds for capital.
- How has the snow removal been pertaining to school safety?
 - The school parking lots are an issue; the Town prioritizes school parking lots last.
 - The School has had ongoing conversation with the DPW and the Town Administrator regarding the need to change the order of priorities when snow plowing. Why can’t the streets and parking lots be plowed at the same time?
 - The School Committee has invited the Town Administrator to one of their meetings to discuss this issue.
 - In addition to DPW staff, the Town pays subcontractors for plowing....why can’t they do the school parking lots?

FY16 Budget Update – Finance Director

Finance Director Pam Dukeman provided handouts on both the municipal and overall Town budgets and provided verbal comments.

Authorization to Exceed Snow and Ice Appropriation

The Fincom is requested to authorize exceeding the snow and ice budget up to \$450K. Pam stated the snow and ice budget is over the \$250K budget by \$331K before last weekend’s storm.

Chairman LeBlanc Cummings stated she wants to learn more about the Town’s priorities on snow removal; perhaps get some answers at the next Fincom meeting.

MOTION: Mr. Blessing moved the Finance and Warrant Commission vote to authorize, under the provisions of Section 31D of Chapter 44 of the Massachusetts General Laws and in consideration of the Selectmen’s approval vote on February 17, 2015 additional expenditures for snow and ice removal up to \$450,000; seconded by Ms. Delisle. VOTE: Unanimous.

Chairman's Update

- The next Fincom meeting is the Town Meeting public hearing on March 2 and will continue to March 3 if necessary.
- At the March 10 meeting, all subcommittee reports will be presented.
- Selectman Nancy Hyde communicated that the Public Safety Task Force will meet on February 18 at 7:30 P.M. at Town Hall. At that meeting, energy issues will be discussed and the Fincom is invited to participate in that process. The Task Force is expected to bring a recommendation to the Board of Selectmen at their February 23 meeting. By the March 2 Fincom hearing there will likely be a proposal.

Fincom members who can are encouraged to attend the Task Force meeting.

- The Long Range Financial Planning Committee has a meeting scheduled on February 11 at which energy efficiencies and and establishment of an energy policy will be discussed.

Meeting Adjourned at 10:00 P.M.

Next Meeting – Public Hearing March 2, 7:30 P.M.

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