

Wakefield Budget Committee
Public Hearing on 2010-11 School Budget
Jan 14, 2010
Approved Minutes

In attendance

Budget Committee: Jan Gagnon, Judy Nason, Howie Knight, Dennis Miller, Asha Kenney, Dave Mankus, Relf Fogg, Liz Olimpio, Mark Duffy

School Board: Toby Eaton, Gail Kushner, Scott Reuning, Priscilla Colbath

Mr. Knight opened the meeting at 7:00 PM with the Pledge of Allegiance. He then urged members of the audience to take copies of the material prepared by the School Board, including an excellent power point presentation explaining all that the School Administrative Unit (SAU) does.

Review of Warrant Articles:

Article 2: School Budget - Mr. Knight opened discussion by noting that the school budget has been approved by the School Board & Budget Committee at \$8,369,466. He also noted that the default budget, should the proposed budget not pass, is \$8,586,641. The default budget is higher than the proposed budget for several reasons:

1. It does not yet include 3 yr teacher contract recently negotiated and covered by a separate Warrant Article
2. It does not yet include 2 yr paraprofessional contract recently negotiated and covered by a separate Warrant Article
3. It does not yet include the SAU budget covered by a separate Warrant Article
4. State law requires that the default budget be based on the previous year's proposed budget plus contractual obligations. He went on to say that the legislature should revisit this formula in light of overall decreasing student populations, etc.

He went on to say that the School Board worked very hard to deliver a sound and tight budget, that, when the teachers, paraprofessionals & SAU budget are included, is still \$22,731 lower than last year. In addition, he noted that additional reductions are anticipated by the Deliberative session as fuel negotiations & public tuition figures are firmed up. Jerry O'Connor offered his appreciation for all the time & effort put in by the School Board in preparing this year's budget. Dick Wessel wondered about the status of the student population and it's effect on the budget. Ms. Gagnon observed that it is in flux, but that the Board is confident it will be able to deal with any changes. Mr. Miller noted that the population in Wakefield, and in fact, statewide, is down, and Mr. Knight added that current population levels were addressed by staff adjustments in the budget. Dave Stear wondered why the default budget is below the proposed budget. Mr. Knight observed that this is the 3rd year this has occurred because of continuing efforts by the Board to not overstate its needs and reiterated his concerns about the state law that directs how the default budget must be calculated. James Miller wondered, of the school administration, whether or not they had more union contracts to negotiate, and if not, would the legal line in the budget be reduced. Ms. Kushner responded that there were no

more union negotiations this year, and noted that the legal line had already been reduced from \$60,000 to \$42,000 during development, with the understanding that it could be increased should labor negotiations require it.

Article 3: SAU budget – Mr. Knight explained that the SAU budget has never before been shown as a separate warrant article. Further, this budget is shared with Milton, the formula based on assessed property values, which are higher in Wakefield, rather than student population, which is higher in Milton. Wakefield’s share of the \$814,797 total budget is \$455,104. He then went on to explain that the passage of this warrant article is a bit different. It doesn’t need to pass in each community. Rather, its adoption is based on the total number of votes cast in each community for & against. He again encouraged the audience to review the power point presentation printed out in the back. When asked what happens if it fails to pass, Mr. Knight said that the default budget would then be in effect.

Article 4: Teacher Contract - Mr. Knight observed that he believes the contract is fair to all concerned, and noted that the Budget Committee voted to approve it 12-0. Mr. Stear wondered about the Merit increase noted for each year. It was noted that this was a misprint in the explanatory material, and that potential merit increases were limited to years 2 & 3 of the contract.

Article 5: Action of Board should #4 fail – gives the School Board the authority to call a special meeting to resolve the cost items. A member of the audience wondered what would happen should both 4 & 5 fail. Ms. Gagnon responded that the issue would have to be directed to Superior Court.

Article 6: Paraprofessional Contract – Mr. Knight noted that he was pleased with this contract as well, approved by the Committee 12-0. It was noted that this contract is for 2 years, not 3, so that the Board doesn’t need to address both union contracts in the same year. Ms. Colbath observed that this contract has a minimal impact on the overall budget, but that the contract does including other wording that is very beneficial.

Article 7: same type of article as #5.

Article 8: Up to \$70,100 for new roof section at Paul School – it was noted that the section of the roof in need of repair is the “rubber” area at the center of the building. Time, patching, and some lack of maintenance has led to severe leaking and the repair cannot be delayed any longer. Ms. Gagnon made sure the audience understood the impact of “up to…” that if \$70,100 is more than is needed, it will not be spent. Further, she wanted to make sure that everyone understood that the funds are to come out of the 2009/10 unreserved fund balance, rather than returning these funds to the Town’s general fund. Mr. Fogg wondered what would happen if \$90,000 was needed to make this repair. Mr. Knight said that the addition funds would not be available, and that the bid process would probably have to be started all over again. It was noted that the article runs for 2 years, so, if repair could be delayed, additional sums could be requested to make up the difference in 2011. James Miller observed that it is important that the public understands

what a yes or no vote means, and it's impact. Ms. Gagnon responded that the School Board's agenda for the next meeting includes detailed explanations of just these issues. Mr. Stear wondered if the damage is severe. The response from a Board member – it's leaking & needs repair now; patches & ice dams are creating puddles aggravating the problem. Mr. Duffy wondered about the Board's contingency plan should the article fail. Ms. Gagnon responded that the Board is working on it, as well as other needed repairs. She went on to observe that the Board believes using the unreserved fund balance is the most effective way to secure the necessary funds. Ms. Nason observed that the roof area in question was originally designed to be an open court, but it was then decided to roof the area because of space needs and the difficulty in removing snow from an enclosed area. It is now used as a hallway and activity area, and has been used as classroom space.

Article 9: vehicle funds – The current Transportation Expendable Trust Fund has app \$39,000 currently. The additional \$25,000 requested this year is enough to purchase the scheduled handicap accessible van, and will get the school almost back on its replacement vehicle schedule. This Trust is used for the purchase of small transportation units. Large buses are leased and are addressed in the budget.

Article 10: New fund for Spec. Ed unexpected needs – also to be established from monies from the unreserved fund balance, should any be left over after application to article 8, these monies are earmarked for unanticipated, Court established expenses for the education of educationally disabled children. It is the Board's intent to build this fund to \$100,000. Mr. Knight observed that the Town had a similar fund, funded at \$15,000, several years ago that never was used, so 3 years ago he voted to have the fund closed and the money returned to the general fund. Recent developments in court ordered education requirements, 3 in Town this year, added to much smaller budgets, have convinced him that a new Trust Fund is needed.

Article 11: "Evergreen" related - Ms. Gagnon explained that this is a non-monetary article wherein the Board is looking for Town approval of its support of the state wide School Board Association's attempt to have the "evergreen" clause reversed. (See the note under Articles 4 & 6 - this clause would effect future labor contract negotiations, not the current one, and says, in essence "the terms of this collective bargaining agreement, including the pay plan, but excluding cost of living increases, will continue in force & effect until a new agreement is executed.) It was observed by several persons that with the "evergreen clause" in effect, teachers & paras have no incentive to negotiate in good faith, because failure to reach a new contract assures then that existing contract terms continue, meaning that step increases continue as well as all other terms & conditions. Reversing the clause puts everyone back on a level playing field for labor negotiations. Ms. Gagnon wanted to make sure everyone understands there is no money attached to this article – only directive for the School Board. Mr. Miller again suggested that detailed explanations of impact of yes/no might be needed. Ms. Gagnon assured him that it would be addressed at the next school board meeting. Mr. Knight observed that while the health insurance contribution for the teachers has been reduced from 88% to 85%, there is also a dollar amount cap on what the town will pay and Ms. Kushner observed

that about ½ of the teachers are already at the maximum step, so without a new contract, they would not see any increase in pay.

Mr. Miller wondered, with the declining enrollment, and the closing of the school in Union, what was going to be done with the modular units at Paul School? Ms. Gagnon confirmed that they are owned, in good condition and still needed. The building committee is still looking into additions, land already available for building, etc, but observed that this is not a good time to be looking for substantial building appropriations. If enrollment continues to decline, new space might not be needed.

Mr. Knight thanked Mr. O'Connor & the PEG channel for its coverage of meetings, observing that this year the electorate will be the best educated yet because of the airing of Committee meetings.

There being no further discussion, Mr. Knight closed the meeting at 7:55PM.

Respectively submitted by Deborah D. Gauthier