

## Wakefield Budget Committee Meeting

November 16, 2020

Approved

Members present: Jerry O'Connor, Priscilla Colbath, Paul Romano, Relf Fogg, Frank Zappala, Connie Twombly, Ken Fifield. Dave Mankus and Denny Miller by Zoom

School Board present: Relf Fogg

School Administration and Department Heads present: Via Zoom Jerry Gregoire, Anne Kebler, Marie D'Agostino, Brennan Peaslee. Present in person, Jim Lampron. Jenn Specter, and Joe Williams

Public Present: Community members by Zoom, Jim Miller with Clearview Community TV

Mr. O'Connor opened up the Budget Committee at 6:00.

Mrs. Colbath said the budget we have before us is not the School Board's budget. It's the Superintendent's budget and it has not been approved by the School Board. The Board received this budget last Wednesday, a few hours prior to their one and only budget discussion. Because there was no time to schedule another meeting to discuss the budget the Board felt they had no choice but to send this one to the Budget Committee.

**Priscilla Colbath made a motion, seconded by Mr. Miller, for the Budget Committee to have a discussion right now and decide what percentage of increase we feel the taxpayers of Wakefield can live with and then send it back so the School Board to make the necessary changes. (Vote 7-2)** Mr. O'Connor asked if we should forego line by line and Mrs. Colbath said if this isn't an approved School Board Budget. I feel we have no choice but to send it back to them and we should give them a percentage to reach. Mr. Miller said he is reluctant to spend any time on a budget that hasn't been approved by the School Board. He feels we should adjourn this meeting and reconvene when we have a budget that's approved by the Board. Mr. Miller said he's done some numbers and in 2020 there was a 10% increase and in 2021 the increase was 5.7% and this year they're asking for 4.9%. If you compound that its 22% over three years for a school that's having a declining enrollment and this doesn't include the teachers' contract. His position is to give them a percentage increase, send it back and not look at it until they bring us back something that's reasonable.

Mr. O'Connor asked Mr. Fogg, as School Board Rep to weigh in. Mr. Fogg responded that he'd asked at the beginning of the budget meeting if the Board would get a chance to bring their thoughts back and were told yes. As the meeting progressed, he realized that wasn't going to happen as there was no time to schedule an additional meeting prior to the Budget Committee receiving the budget. He said there are areas that should be addressed by the Board. Mr. Miller reiterated that it's a waste of time to look at a budget that hasn't been approved by the Board. Mr. O'Connor said he had looked at 2019-2020 that ended in June, that budget was \$10.1million but ultimately it wound up being \$9.6 million and this year we're looking at \$11,273,000 which has been advertised as a 4.7% increase but looking at the actuals that's closer to a 16 ½ % increase. Mr. Fogg said we should be able to have something approved by the next meeting,

November 30<sup>th</sup>. Hopefully, we will find time to discuss it at tomorrow's meeting. He can't make a promise but it's urgent for him to get this done. Mr. O'Connor said it seems that the budget should be an important item, you need money to run the school. There have been several months to work on this even with so much going on. Mr. Miller said looking at what we've given the school over the last three years and the big unknown is the 44 teachers and what the contract is going to cost us. It could add another 5% to this budget.

**Mr. Miller made a motion, seconded by Mr. Romano, to tell the School Board that they can have one and a half percent over last year's budget and that's it. (Vote 6-2-1)**

Mr. Fogg explained that some increases will cause other associated costs like retirement, insurances and things like that. Mrs. Colbath said the town had to deal with those same things and she thinks only two departments came in over last years numbers. There will be two Contracts as separate warrant articles and if they pass that increase will be added to the operating budget. They are negotiating with the Paras and the teachers this year. Mr. Miller recalls them talking about the yellow plan which would decrease the insurance costs. He realizes costs will go up but there can be increases in some areas and decreases in other lines. Mr. Zappala asked Mr. Fogg if it would be easier for the School Board to manage a level funding? Mr. Fogg said that would be a solution but doesn't feel that would be the will of the Board. Mr. Zappala encouraged spending less money in some lines. It's ok. Mrs. Twombly said we should not be comparing the Town to the School. She said the Town had things too that increased quite a bit. Mr. Fifield asked if this vote was a recommendation, more of a target? Mrs. Colbath said once it hits us it's our budget. Our budget is the one that goes to the voters. They're going to work this out the best they can, come back to us, have a discussion about what they can do and what they can't do and if the Budget Committee isn't completely happy we can cut where we want to, we can cut the bottom line. So, I don't think Mr. Fogg is not going to have any trouble with his Board members meeting and getting this ironed out because the next option is, we do it. Mr. O'Connor explained that our budget goes to the voters and the school crafts the default budget. This way the voters have a choice.

Mrs. D'Agostino asked what the Public Hearing and the Deliberative session dates are. Mr. O'Connor said they have not been set but when they are, we will let her know.

**Mrs. Twombly made a motion, seconded by Mr. Romano, to approve the minutes of October 31<sup>st</sup>. (Vote 9-0)**

**Mrs. Colbath made a motion, seconded by Mr. Romano, to adjourn the meeting at 6:58. (Vote 9-0)**

Respectfully submitted for approval at the next Budget Committee meeting,

Priscilla Colbath

Secretary Pro Temp