

Wakefield Budget Committee Meeting
with the school
held in the Town Hall Opera House
September 12, 2023
Approved

Members present: Jerry O'Connor, Tom Daniels, Priscilla Colbath, Denny Miller, Howie Knight, Brennan Peaslee, Ken Fifield, John Parker, Josh Fuller and Mark Taliaferro.

School Administration: Superintendent Anne Kebler and Business Administrator Frank Markiewicz.

Public present: Natalie Kelley, Doug Soares, Relf Fogg, and Max Gering with Clearview Community TV

Mr. O'Connor opened up the school portion of the Budget Committee meeting at 7:14 to review the school's end of the year report and their current status.

Mrs. Kebler told the Board that she is in the process of doing the ESSER report but it's not ready for tonight. It will be going to the School Board on Tuesday and then she will email it to the Budget Committee. Mr. Daniels said last year you had done a summary along with details of specific examples of how the money would be spent and that was very helpful.

Mr. Miller asked for an update on how the school is doing with bus drivers, teachers and personnel. Mrs. Kebler replied that we are not fully staffed. We need third and fifth grade teachers. We currently have two long term subs covering those classrooms. She said we are a lot better off than some schools. She heard that Farmington is down twenty teachers. We're not very competitive with our salaries. She had offered jobs to four or five people who couldn't take that kind of cut in pay. The governor of Maine set a minimum for teachers last year at \$40,000 and this year \$50,000. Our starting salary is \$35,000.

Mrs. Kebler said we have para negotiations this year. Teachers were supposed to come next year and they have a request to negotiate this year. We are in good shape with bus drivers having one apply today. We will have seven drivers. We are not in good shape with paras and ABA tutors. She said that one of the lines that is over is Contracted Services. Driven by IDEA we had to hire contracted people, which was double what we pay our employees. We currently have a couple of people through contracted services but are actively advertising. We are budgeting long term subs in the teacher line. Mr. O'Conner said that the surplus this year says \$407,000. Mr. Markiewicz explained that this is not an audited number. The audit has yet to be completed. He said up until today he was just mentoring the districts BA. I was asked by the Superintendent if I could create a statement for the fiscal year that just ended. This budget needs some adjustments. The number looks solid after looking at it last Thursday for the first time. Mr. Miller asked if one specific area makes up the majority of that number. Mr. Markiewicz said it's all over the budget. They did take in more revenue than was projected. The High School Tuition line was under.

Mr. Daniels asked, how did we begin the year with \$137,000? Mr. Markiewicz explained that the school doesn't actually return the money to the Town. It gets carried forward as a credit as our cash balance. That's what we use to start our next fiscal year. He said unanticipated income was high and it shouldn't have been. It's income that comes in from the state or a refund. I'm researching two transactions that appear to be grant revenue that shouldn't have been posted to the general fund. It could lower the cash balance by that amount. Those figures will change a bit because of the reduction made to the bottom line.

Mrs. Kebler said there is an activity that has been approved through ESSER that will pay for some of the contracted services. Mr. Daniels asked, are we going to have a problem in 2024 on the lines that are overspent in the private tuition accounts? Mrs. Kebler said those are three unanticipated placements. If we had correct staffing one of those placements would have stayed inhouse. If we get the staff we would pull them back. One is at Spauling and hopefully they will be able to make it there. Mr. Daniels would like to dial that in so we are anticipating the correct amount. Mr. Knight said those are the hardest lines to budget because someone may come in and that's a \$100,000 hit. The Trust Fund is used when needed for unanticipated if the number can't be covered by the operating budget. That's what it was specifically set up for.

Mr. Daniels asked if it was likely that we will come in within budget for contracted services for bus transportation this year. Mrs. Kebler said she believes we will be over but not by as much. The bus manager is hopeful that she can incorporate the special ed transportation costs into our own budget using non CDL drivers. She said two buses are being evaluated and we are waiting for a report to see what bus purchases we will need to make. Mrs. Kebler said there's a new law that says we have to provide services through students twenty second birthday year. We have two nearing that age.

Mr. Miller said we always reduced the tuition line by two or three students from the High School Tuition line until the law was changed to eighteen. We always seem to have a considerable surplus in that line which we have to raise taxes for. He asked the Budget Committee to think about reducing that line at Deliberative Session by two or three students. He said we have historically over funded that line. Mrs. Colbath will do some research to get an idea of how much might be able to be reduced. Mr. O'Conner would like to look more closely at the default budget this year. He'd like to see how they are done. Mr. Miller said we have had many default budgets that have come in higher than the operating budget.

Mr. O'Conner asked Mrs. Kebler if she could have the school budget ready for discussion by early to mid-November and completed by Thanksgiving. She said that's her goal.

Mr. Miller asked about the gym floor. Mrs. Kebler said that the School Board Attorney Matt Upton is working on this. Mr. Upton has warned the Board that it may cost as much to litigate as it would to pay for a new floor. They are waiting for a report from a third party investigator. Mr. Markiewicz said he was involved up until May but hasn't been part of this since then. He said the problem is the contractor, when he applied the underlayment leveling material it didn't set properly. There are no tiles coming up. There is also another issue. The basketball court is also off center. The contractor measured the center line from the stage not the wall. The lines are imbedded into the tile itself. The contractor was only insured for \$25,000. There are peaks and

valleys on the floor because it's not set properly. He said if there was a performance bond, things would be different.

Mr. Knight said with the BA gone, his concern is that you're not going to get a parttime BA to handle the school finances. It's too complicated with the grants, ESSER and state laws. He believes they need a full time BA. Mrs. Colbath said they are looking for a full time BA and Mr. Markiewicz will put in a couple of days and we've got to allow him to do the best he can with the amount of work he has plus playing catch up. Mr. Markiewicz said BA's are all retiring. This is not a 9 to 5, 40 hour a week job. It doesn't matter if its several schools or one, it's still the same amount of work. It's become so complex with the state putting so many more reporting requirements on districts. You have to be willing to put the time in. Mrs. Colbath said there are three districts around us looking for BA's.

Mrs. Kebler told the Committee the school is part of a new program sponsored by the Department of Labor to increase the teacher workforce. We're one of three schools that will bring in an apprentice program which will be a good recruiting tool. Paras who have worked at the school will get college credit for their time. Classes will be offered through the community college system and held right at the school. The school audit for 2022 has just been finalized and 2023 hasn't started yet.

The Budget Committee will meet on October 26th, 28th and November 1st to review the Town budget.

Mr. Knight made a motion, seconded by Mrs. Peaslee, to adjourn the meeting at 8:00 p.m. (Vote 10-0)

Respectfully submitted for approval at the next Budget Committee meeting,

Priscilla Colbath,
Secretary **Pro Temp**