

WILLINGTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS
BOARD OF EDUCATION MEETING MINUTES
TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 13, 2018
(Unofficial Until Board Approval)

The meeting was called to order at 7:00 p.m. by Chairman Michelle Cunningham at the Town Office Building.

PRESENT: Michelle Cunningham, Ann Grosjean, Marybeth Wallett, Tracey Anderson, Chiara Bambara, Elena Testa

ABSENT: Herb Arico

PRESENT TO SPEAK:

Judy Threatt, resident at 19 Birch Meadow Lane since 2002 stated she has two students at Hall School, one in grade 8 and one in grade 6 and she is concerned about eliminating the library position. She has done research, read petitions online, found studies showing direct correlation between having a strong librarian and student academic success. She spoke to a lot of people including EO Smith who has grave concerns about eliminating this position. She stated if you examine what a librarian does it is a lot more besides checking out books, in this media age and the digital world. The librarian teaches a lot to students about online research and evaluating databases and sources. The grade 5 classes focus on this and the librarian supports the teachers on how to do these projects. Started a petition and received 138 signatures from parents and residents requesting the Board to reconsider eliminating the library media specialist position along with 148 signatures from the community, consisting of prior teachers, students and residents with positive library experience. She explained she is passionate about a town like this not having a librarian. She feels the students need to have a librarian to teach the basics so students can succeed in Hall School.

Amy McCarthy, resident at 219 River Road since 2001 stated her third child is currently in grade 8 at Hall School. She is concerned about the library position being eliminated and decision to have a para instead. Stated we have incredible teachers, the BOE is diligent in budget and fiscally responsible but there have been cuts after cuts in the programs in schools. She has two older children that have mentioned they do not feel as prepared as the Mansfield and Ashford students at EO Smith. Taking away the librarian position would be a detriment to the progress. A librarian helps to bring the material contextually appropriate to our learners, help children that are not doing well in reading by finding material they respond to and enjoy reading. Do not want to see kids lose that valuable help and resource.

Thomas Fox, 39 Eldredge Mills Road, reserved right to speak at the end of the meeting.

Erin/Shawn Pelletier, 87 Potter School Road, reserved right to speak at the end of the meeting.

Laura Rodriguez, 52 Timber Lane, resident, former teacher of gr.7 science and grades 7/8 science at HMS, left to teach at a STEM school and now at the University of Connecticut in the Doctoral program. She asked her son who went through the Willington schools from grade 2 -8, to EO Smith and onto graduate from Cornell and is now a mechanical engineer in California, about his experiences at HMS and in school in general with the media specialists and library. He expressed that it was incredibly important especially at HMS, the librarian before the current librarian inspired his love of reading and found the books he liked. When changes began in society with digital literacy, he said he had learned and started with the cards and dewey decimal

system an evolved with the computer system. The library is not just for a love of reading but also now for the important skills of how to find valid, reliable information online. He emphasized how the librarian taught that not all sources are good sources and how to be a critical consumer. Teachers try to teach these skills and incorporate but there is only just so much time to teach these skills but students can go into the library and make their education stronger.

Peter Latincsics, 97 Trask Road, thanked the Board, administration, interim superintendent for all the hard work and efficiency. He stated he attended most workshops and has a sense of the progress made and is pleased by both the BOE and administration's talking issues. He has three questions. First ECS question, if there are changes in the ECS are there contingencies in the process. Second, overall process for budget as a whole and what the BOF requested each department to submit not entirely clear but probably more to it. Third, as largest budget group important to understand long term budget issues instead of one year. Grand list, foundations, state problems, what doing beyond the single year to position ourselves so it becomes easier than presently? Stated he was encouraged by what he heard in deliberations, the focus of the administration. The town is behind you, of the 12 million the BOE has 8 million of it so no question the town supports education and always has.

MOTION: by Ann Grosjean, seconded by Marybeth Wallett to move Agenda item 8E under New Business, Approval of 2018-2019 Superintendent's Proposed Spending Plan (Budget) before item 3 Communications.

VOTE: All in Favor

Motion Passed

NEW BUSINESS:

Chairman Cunningham reviewed process of budget approval. Dr. Jacoby explained the letter of transmittal and thought process for the budget and administrative team for the budget presented to the Board of Education.

Budget for 17/18 was \$8.1 million and had a 6.9% increase from last year to this year, with staff contractual obligations, which are reasonable, the hefty increase of 14% insurance estimate, based on BOE insurance coordinator, the contracts for transportation, utilities, fuel and the special education mandates, it all adds up. The administration recognizes uncertainty of the times, not just financial but support at the State and locally. Need to think about context in which carry 6.9% increase and what would do. Painstakingly every line item was looked and settled on reductions. Additional grants could offset if available. Some grants received naturally and some needed to go after to help reduce budget. Through attrition and choosing not to fill this position. Looked at special education mandates able to eliminate two para professional positions, and shared special education transportation services with other communities afforded some savings.

Reduce a position the library media specialist at HMS. We are respectful of the position and what it does, but wanted to maintain reasonable class sizes and even though the library touches lives it is not the same way as the classroom does. Added a para librarian position to assist in the library. With all the reductions presented 2.2% budget presented to the Board of Education.

In addition, there are not any new initiatives in the budget, we share services with the town such as payroll, business manager, human services and fuel. Continue to look to produce revenue such as opening a special education program, if space allows for pre-k for special needs students and tuition in from other communities

We are living in a challenging time and it is not easy to sit here and say this is what we are reducing, it is painful to all of us. Presenting a balanced budget that is educationally sound, moving into the 21st century and fiscally responsible to the Board of Education and the community.

Board stated they were requested to cut 2.4% from the current budget by the Board of Finance, today's does not meet that additional request. The line items already include the reductions recommended by administration

MOTION: by Michelle Cunningham seconded by Ann Grosjean to approve Program 3, Special Education and Related Services PK-8 budget in the requested amount of \$2,026,658.

VOTE: All in Favor

Motion Passed

Dr. Jacoby explained program 4, transportation represents an increase of about 3.5 because this is a bump year in the five year contract, after this it will be 2 or less, it levels out and overall is 1.5 less than any other communities.

Phil Stevens completed a transportation audit. There are a lot of miles in this community which unfortunately means we could not make a reduction. These are the kinds of steps we take prior to presenting a budget.

Marybeth Wallett stated the Finance committee reviewed the transportation contract and Dr. Jacoby has thought of it all, getting the best price for each item.

MOTION: by Michelle Cunningham, seconded by Chiara Bambara to approve Program 4, Transportation budget in the requested amount of \$453,602.

VOTE: All in Favor

Motion Passed

Dr. Jacoby prefaced that there are only two nurses, one at each school and both are 10 month employees. The summer program nurse is a separate paid item.

MOTION: by Michelle Cunningham, seconded by Elena Testa to approve Program 5, Health Services budget in the requested amount of \$104,247.

VOTE: All in Favor

Motion Passed

Dr. Jacoby informed there is a 22% decrease partly due to beginning the curriculum work last year. Started with curriculum audit, consultants and in house people at CES this year and will begin at HMS. Next year in house people take leadership over and use consultants sparingly. This was one of the programs looked at as a 3 year project.

MOTION: by Michelle Cunningham, seconded by Marybeth Wallett to approve Program 6,

Program for Curriculum and Staff Development in the requested amount of \$66,835.

VOTE: All in Favor

Motion Passed

Dr. Jacoby stated there were not any expected increases in usage of utilities, recognized that Donna Latincsics in monitoring shared resources in town including heating oil, which she carefully watches the price beginning in October and when prices down, locks in the price in November.

MOTION: by Michelle Cunningham, seconded by Tracey Anderson to approve Program 7, Utilities In the requested amount of \$180,788.

VOTE: All in Favor

Motion Passed

MOTION: by Michelle Cunningham, seconded by Chiara Bambara to approve Program 8, Operations/Maintenance in the requested amount of \$308,591.

VOTE: All in Favor

Motion Passed

Board discussed Program 9, System-wide Support.

Elena Testa stated different options such as a part time superintendent which the town had in the 70s to the 80s. It was one position of principal at HMS, one position as part time principal at CES and part time Superintendent. Suggested to give this option a try. Explained cutting library position has one purpose, BOF says cut budget otherwise taxes go up 6.8%. If you keep position, going to be much higher taxes, need to consider 6000 people in town concerned about taxes, no one wants to pay more.

MOTION: by Elena Testa to support one part time superintendent position and part time principal position for next year.

No Second.

Motion Fails

Marybeth Wallett stated discussion around where to cut, hearing at the top instead of a teacher/librarian. Is there more to do at the top? Dr. Jacoby gave option of part time superintendent w/a stipend for an associate superintendent for savings of about \$88,000. We have the State in flux, building studies happening, community wants to make decisions about how to save money when we don't know what State is going to do.

MOTION: by Marybeth Wallett, seconded by Elena Testa to approve option to move from full time superintendent to part time superintendent with a stipend for an associate superintendent for a savings in the amount of \$88,000.

VOTE: Yes: Elena Testa, Marybeth Wallett
No: Tracey Anderson, Chiara Bambara, Michelle Cunningham,

Abstain: Ann Grosjean

Motion failed

Ann Grosjean stated in support of a one year option then get all schools into one building which will result in fewer administration and people. Following year put full time back in and would need full time to handle the facilities studies and would like it to be Dr. Jacoby. She has led us in all kinds of directions efficiently, no other person would be able to come in 2 days a week and learn all about us and move us forward. Recommend Phil Stevens as the part time associate to work together in partnership, have worked closely together already.

Michelle Doucette Cunningham clarified that this is not a living position, not posted, no guarantee that if were to be posted, that Dr. Jacoby would want the position and no guarantee who the people will be if put forward and voted in. The caveat on a one year time frame, we do not have control over future years, this budget is for one year only and then move forward. Will remember it but does not hold us to that for the budget for the next year.

Chiara Bambara clarified that going with this budget does not necessarily increase the taxes as stated earlier, premature to say that now. Concern about the part time superintendent, is that next year start at a lower dollar amount and if want to get it back to a full time position will be hard to get it back in the budget. Also premature to expect the facilities studies to result in a new building, from what have heard everybody balked at the numbers and no one in town is ready to consider that anytime soon.

Michelle Doucette Cunningham stated it is on the agenda to discuss but no way to get a school building up in one year, not ready for this year.

Marybeth Walleth stated that we need more clarity for plan and administrative structure at that time.

Elena Testa said she stated approximate numbers, not official, personal calculation based on letter from BOF and BOE and was an anticipation shortfall of 1.08% of the previous year from being as much as 1.16% revenue loss. Letter from BOF to all Boards in town referenced not just less but lower to keep taxes under control. Assuming questions from people of why this is going on. Can cut bus, teacher, etc. but if have it all then budget is 10% and then you may not have any children in town to teach because everyone moves out. Keep education needs of kids to best of ability.

Michelle Doucette Cunningham has a pushback on the tax increase, 8.3 million is a reduction of the budget from 2013-14 year. We are already below the number from then. So 5 years ago the taxes did not increase and we are lower than the budget amount at that time, stands to reason the town taxes would not increase as a result of the numbers presented for this budget. We are 2/3 of the whole package, a 1 mill tax increase - is it worth it in order to keep education as is? The town will have to grapple with that, tonight personally and as a Board, what think about and bring to the table? The governor proposed flat funded, but who knows, don't expect changes in that, not expecting a half million decrease again in the future, always a risk but not sensing the panic some are feeling.

Marybeth Walleth asked what the enrollment was 5 years ago.

Michelle Doucette Cunningham responded it was 430 almost the same as today.

No Second, Motion Failed.

Marybeth Wallett stated with contract raise does not seem right to implement a furlough day, would be taking back a chunk of that. Does not want to do that.

MOTION: by Michelle Cunningham, seconded by Tracey Anderson to approve Program 1, Center School Elementary Education K-4 budget in the requested amount of \$1,620,623.

VOTE: Yes: Tracey Anderson, Chiara Bambara, Michelle Cunningham,
 Ann Grosjean, Marybeth Wallett
 No: Elena Testa

Motion Passed

MOTION: by Elena Testa, seconded by Marybeth Wallett to change one secretarial position to a 10 month position.

VOTE: Yes: Elena Testa
 No: Tracey Anderson, Chiara Bambara, Michelle Cunningham,
 Ann Grosjean
 Abstain: Marybeth Wallett

Motion Failed

Michelle Doucette Cunningham asked if this would be a union issue if cut back from 12 to 10 months.

Dr. Jacoby responded she did not think so as it is a result of fiscal crisis.

Chiara Bambara asked if one ten month is it the same days as the teachers. Dr. Jacoby responded, depends on what position you have to look at it, but generally only a week difference between school end and the summer months.

Michelle Doucette Cunningham said torn on this, small amount in the big picture, especially over the years, the secretaries are the heart of the schools, if you want something done you talk to them. Custodians are #2 behind that. A lot to get done in the building, possible but not as much contact on student achievement, not convinced cut has to happen.

Ann Grosjean stated not a lot of money but makes a big difference in the school.

Elena Testa stated 500 students in Vernon schools and school only has 2 secretaries.

Chiara Bambara stated one building in Vernon and has 2 secretaries and paras to help. Because they don't work in the summer, they hire two-three paras to help before school starts to get everything ready. Here it is not 6 only 4 school secretaries, one is a superintendent secretary and one is a special education secretary.

Dr. Jacoby stated when you look at Hartford and other larger districts, the administrative structure is different and you have more people at central offices to do the work. The structure here is that the secretaries handle more things that would be done by a central office. Need to look at available support before you take any services from individual schools.

Marybeth Wallett stated no decisions are made in a vacuum, different discussions take place, not needed to change now, need to look at everything.

Elena Testa stated at two meetings people were present to disagree with the library position being reduced to a para position with heartfelt words, community signed petition, conversations with teachers, concerns and research, think this warrants discussion before vote. As a colleague prefer to keep library position and remove para.

MOTION: by Tracey Anderson to reinstate the library media specialist position and remove the library para professional position and in exchange change the 12 month secretary to a 10 month and add a furlough day.

AMEND MOTION: by Tracey Anderson to increase Program 2, HMS budget by \$68,411 to reinstate the library media specialist position and remove the library para professional position.

Friendly AMEND MOTION: by Michelle Cunningham, seconded by Tracey Anderson to increase overall budget bottom line by \$68,411 to reinstate the library media specialist position and remove the library para professional position.

VOTE: Yes: Tracey Anderson, Chiara Bambara, Michelle Cunningham,
 Ann Grosjean
 No: Elena Testa, Marybeth Wallett

Motion Passed

Marybeth Wallett stated that Dr. Jacoby is like a CEO who makes change, knows best, discusses, suggests and we defer to her a lot. It would not be right if say cut music now instead and 500 people show up here to disagree with that. We have to trust our CEO who made a recommendation and has years of experience and knows what's needed.

Ann Grosjean asked if \$68,411 is that less the para? Dr. Jacoby responded the bottom line is an additional \$68,411 to remove para and add library position back in.

Tracey Anderson stated owe people discussion on library media specialist.

Elena Testa stated reminder that the budget we present to Board of Finance and number reduced is going to make taxes go up 1 more % .

Chiara Bambara stated the taxes do not work like that, the school budget 2.8%, higher than Board of Finance asked to come in at.

Marybeth Wallett stated feel Dr. Jacoby did a good job.

Michelle Doucette Cunningham stated agree we need to look at superintendent as CEO and depend on the thoughtfulness and the time putting options together. Stated we appreciate the thoughts and public outpouring of support for education in general tonight and need people to back the budget and the Board of Finance needs to hear from the public. Being a part of the conversations is important. For limited increase, I think the town has never not passed a budget in referendum in the past because of support for the schools. Look back a decade and see increases, look at 5 years ago, the percentage increase over time not close to the cost of living,

even due to declining enrollment. We maintain without breaking the bank, do not panic. Always a risk for the State level repercussions and consequences to bottom line. Loud and clear communications were heard, we value this support, the public input and support matter and we depend on it. Need to represent the people that voted us in these seats.

Marybeth Wallett stated have heard from people saying will lose homes based on the money, hard to drown that out. People passionate about one topic need to hear from all the people.

Tracey Anderson stated on other side, apologize about motion, process of motion made, did not realize each item was exclusive in each program.

Ann Grosjean asked to clarify motion, put library position in, para position out for \$68,411 increase to the bottom line of the overall budget.

Marybeth Wallett appreciates passion, understand and it is great that people came out to speak. Board must be careful about problem if BOE does not get the money and BOF asks for more cuts, different people may come out, can't restrict cuts to popular opinion, setting a precedent.

Michelle Doucette Cunningham stated she has never heard from anyone saying the taxes are too high and they are going to move out of town. Need to go with what we hear and believe in our hearts. Add steps to come back too, maybe good news from insurance people. To the best of knowledge at this point it is the only piece in here that is of any uncertainty.

Elena Testa stated liked to have presentation from Special Education Director. We will plan this for a future agenda.

MOTION: by Michelle Cunningham, seconded by Marybeth Wallett to approve Program 2, Hall Memorial Middle School Education 5-8 budget in the requested amount of \$1,818,896.

VOTE: Yes: Tracey Anderson, Chiara Bambara, Michelle Cunningham,
 Ann Grosjean
 No: Elena Testa, Marybeth Wallett

Motion Passed

COMMUNICATIONS:

None

BOARD OF EDUCATION CHAIRMAN'S REPORT:

None

SUPERINTENDENT REPORTS:

Dr. Jacoby informed that the Town will receive a \$30,000 security grant reimbursement for work done at HMS.

Dr. Jacoby discussed the loss of heat resulting in a pipe bursting in the band room at HMS on January 6. The insurance company will pay \$35,000 for the incident repairs including carpet replacement, instrument repairs, and replacing and repairing ventilators. Our deductible will

have to be paid but the insurance company could not have been better to work with.

FINANCIAL REPORTS:

Marybeth Wallett stated financial report showing at 3.1% remaining and on track.

Superintendent informed the deficit of -5% showing is due to the Special Education grant offset which has not yet been taken, once completed it will not show a deficit of this amount.

COMMITTEE REPORTS:

None

NEW BUSINESS:

MOTION: by Marybeth Wallett seconded by Tracey Anderson to approve the January 9, 2018 Willington Board of Education Meeting Minutes as presented.

VOTE: All in Favor

Motion Passed

MOTION: by Chiara Bambara seconded by Ann Grosjean to approve the January 29, January 31 and February 1, 2018 BOE Budget Workshop minutes as presented.

VOTE: All in Favor

Motion Passed

Board discussed the calendar changes informing that a 2 hour delay could have prevented at least one of the snow days this year. E.O. Smith and sending towns all agreed to move to a 2 hour delay. Principals will inform families

MOTION: by Chiara Bambara, seconded by Marybeth Wallett to approve the Willington Public Schools 2017-2018 calendar as presented to change the February 20 and 21, 2018 Staff Professional Development days to student days and make up the Staff Professional Development days at the end of this school year after students leave for the year.

VOTE: All in Favor

Motion Passed

Board held first reading of Policy and Regulation 6142.101, Instruction, Health and Wellness. Dr. Jacoby informed of an audit every 3 years of the food and nutrition programs taking place. Health and Wellness policy needed to be revised.

PRESENT TO SPEAK:

Thomas Fox, 39 Eldredge Mills Road, asked how much money is allocated to each student and how many students in Willington Public Schools. He suggested that the whole system be overhauled and the system be privatized without any union regulations or anything like that. Any teachers would bid on a contract to teach, lease out the school. Money allocated to each student should go with each student whether they are home schooled, private school or parochial. The parent should decide where they go. This would solve the problem of two schools, one half

empty and one overcrowded.

Judy Threatt, 19 Birch Meadow Lane, stated Board members hearts are in doing the right thing for the schools, staff, and everyone appreciates the work of the BOE, administration, teachers, and Dr. Jacoby, love the town and all of you.

Robert Jellen, 38 Lucerne Drive, stated he was a member of the BOE for 8 years, Region 19 for 17 years and reelected in November and a career teacher for 37 years in education. Stated main goal in participation in boards is to maintain and ensure students given most expansive and rudimentary education. Appreciates all do but caution that the main goal is educating children well and not keeping the tax base down. If speaking to compromising, keep in mind along with the Board of Finance, who has an important function, the Board of Education supersedes with the most important function to educate all children well from pre-k to high school. In the early 90's Willington became a part of Region 19, CES, HMS, to EOS providing children with the best possible education in this part of Connecticut. EOS acceptance rate is exceptional at colleges across the country. Never look at what BOF is going to say, if not enrolled in school, the tax payer understands but has responsibility to community as well.

Mike Cioe, Teacher at HMS thanked the Board for all the thought that goes into different things for different people. Thanked Dr. Jacoby and the administration, we cannot do our jobs if you don't do well. Stated the HMS Musical is in a couple weeks presenting the Little Mermaid.

Peter Latincsics, 97 Trask Rd, thanked the Board again and administration for all the hard work and reassured that he differed slightly with Bob in the respect that the Boards work together with the BOF. Consider scheduling a joint meeting to focus on some changes occurring such as MBR, MER etc. with the Hartford changes, may be appropriate to address what Tracey said. Come together to look at and get to a place that works. Thanks again.

Linda Minor, Navartil Road, thanked the Board. Stated a lot of work by Dr. Jacoby who helped with getting public information, spoken well and agrees with the direction even though part time Superintendent it seems to serve the student and community well. Stick with the part time Superintendent, hopefully Dr. Jacoby, but part time has been working out great and serves the students well.

BOARD COMMENTS:

Tracey Anderson thanked Phil Stevens and Ken Craig for the recent tours of the schools this week, nice to see fantastic things happening in the schools. Thanked all who came out tonight and whether spoke or not, good to attend.

Ann Grosjean thanked everyone for coming out tonight. Hoping to have same support when comes to referendum and working with the Board of Finance.

Chiara Bambara thanked the administrators for the tour and everyone for caring. Hope to have more conversations with the BOF to understand the state and local budget effects. Main goal is to educate children well. Thanked Dr. Jacoby and don't think that she questioned her CEO abilities. Dr. Jacoby responded that is her job to provide all the options.

Marybeth Wallett thanked administrators for the tour, was nice to see how little the children at CES are and reminded her how big her own children have become. Thanked Dr. Jacoby for all the work done. All the BOE meetings, not just tonight, we need to vote our conscious and not do nothing. Invite people to be passionate about position, get involved in bigger conversations,

need to get volunteers, get more involved, drive forward and help keep the schools.

Elena Testa stated she is not just a lady who wants to cut all, fire all, but strongly believes the BOE main goal is to educate children. Represent people who voted for her. Need a healthy balance, the greatest part, not just see the 410 kids but the rest of the 6,000 people too.

Michelle Cunningham thanked the public for their participation. Audience voice matters, voices matter not only tonight but need to continue. Does not hold up if do not continue. Thanked all the BOE members, all volunteers and appreciates all the work they do.

Meeting adjourned at 9:07 p.m.

Nichole Page
Recording Secretary