

WESTWOOD SCHOOL COMMITTEE
Westwood, Massachusetts

MEETING MINUTES
February 4, 2021

Attendance and Call to Order

The meeting, held remotely¹, was called to order at 7:00pm by Chair Carol Lewis. Also present were: Maya Plotkin, Vice Chairperson; Charles Donahue, Clerk; Anthony Mullin; and Amanda Phillips. Superintendent Emily Parks; Assistant Superintendent Allison Borchers; Director of Business and Finance Lemma Jn-baptiste; and Director of Student Services Abigail Hanscom were present on behalf of the District. John Cianciarulo recorded the minutes.

Mrs. Lewis also recognized the live stream of the meeting, which was provided for real-time, public access to the activities of the School Committee. Members of the public were able to view a live stream of the meeting via the Internet at www.westwood.k12.ma.us/live. Westwood Media Center also recorded the meeting for later broadcast on its platforms.

Discussion Items

Presentation of Superintendent's Recommended FY'22 Operating and Capital Budgets

Superintendent Parks presented.

FY'21 Context

- COVID-19 Expenses to Date: \$1.9M
 - Technology: \$623k
 - Operations: \$320k
 - Student Services: \$535k
 - Other: \$400k
 - Remote teaching support
 - Food Service supplies
 - Online platform for ordering meals
 - Lunch supervision
 - Overtime
 - August graduation ceremony
- Reduced Revenue Deficit to Date: \$250k
 - Busing
 - FY'21 projected negotiated bus savings of \$35k
 - Reduced bus fee revenue (\$94k in FY'21 versus \$184k in FY'20)
 - Food Services
 - September through December revenue loss (\$56k in FY'21 versus \$279k in FY'20)
 - Despite a 53% reduction in staff, a net loss of over \$100k to date
 - Extended Day
 - Program closed, no \$100k offset
 - No viable reduction in a bus or custodian position

Despite over \$2M this year in unanticipated COVID-related expenses/revenue loss related to COVID, the district is on track to close the FY'21 budget on June 30 without having to take further stabilization efforts.

¹ Remote meeting held in accordance with Executive Order of Massachusetts Governor, March 12, 2020

This was accomplished with:

- Reallocation/elimination of staff positions totaling approximately \$650k of the FY'21 approved budget FTEs
- State Funding of \$225 per student, totaling approximately \$675k provided by the Commonwealth for COVID-related expenses
- CARES/FEMA: The Town supported charging \$750k to the CARES Act and/or seeking FEMA reimbursement

FY'22 Budget Assumptions

- Students have returned to full, in-person instruction
- Federal entitlement grants will be level-funded
- Chapter 70 will be level-funded
- Circuit Breaker will be funded at 70%
- Fee-based offsets will return to FY'20 levels

Therefore, budget requests focus on recovery and stabilization in FY'22 from disruption.

- Academic support and intervention
- Mental health support
- Return to strategic priorities that have had to take a backseat

Recent additions provide a foundation. The FY'20 and FY'21 budgets included several positions related to strategic priorities that provide a strong foundation for needs going into FY'22. The positions included:

- 0.5 FTE Middle School English Language Arts Specialist
- 1.0 FTE Middle School Guidance Counselor
- 1.0 FTE High School Guidance Counselor
- 1.0 FTE PreK-8 Social Emotional Learning Coordinator

FY'22 Proposed Operating Budget

- FY'21 Final Budget--\$48,347,500
- Proposed FY'22 Budget--\$50,003,345

The proposed budget reflects an increase of \$1,655,845, or 3.4%.

In order to provide some context, the operating budget increases over the last several years were reviewed:

- FY'16: 5.4%
- FY'17: 6.0%
- FY'18: 3.3%
- FY'19: 3.4%
- FY'20: 3.5%
- FY'21: 3.6%
- FY'22: 3.4%

School budgets are largely about people, consisting of:

- Salaries: 86.7%
- Maintenance: 4.4%
- SPED: 2.5%
- Other: 6.3%

A table showing the major budget categories was shared:

- Total salaries: \$42,089,532 in the FY'21 budget increased 3.0% to \$43,371,359

- SPED: \$1,058,367 in the FY'21 budget increased 19.1% to \$1,242,828
 - This increase is driven by an \$85k investment in contracted services, addressing short-term student needs; and an increase of 3% in special education tuition and transportation lines due to rates that are determined by the state and contractual increases
- Utilities: \$1,207,000 in the FY'21 budget decreased 0.6% to \$1,200,000
- Operations and Maintenance: \$993,335 in the FY'21 budget increased 2.7% to \$1,020,335
- All other: \$2,839,267 in the FY'21 budget increased 3.4% to \$50,003,345

General Education

Enrollment trends were reviewed. Elementary enrollment is projected to increase in the coming years, while secondary decreases.

Mr. Mullin asked how many students attended private school this year due to the district's hybrid learning model and the pandemic. Superintendent Parks responded that there was no dramatic change; the district did not see an exodus of students that others have experienced.

Enrollment by level was shared. The district total is decreasing, from 3,024 in FY'20, to 3,000 in FY'21, to a projected 2,906 for FY'22. Superintendent Parks stated that the FY'22 projected elementary enrollment of 1,197 is likely low as it is a representation of what can be "seen" right now. Enrollment projection reports suggest elementary enrollment will increase next year.

High School enrollment is projected to decline. A chart showing enrollment from 2010 to 2030 (historic and projected) was presented. In the FY'21 budget, there was not a large decline and no cuts in high school staff were taken in the approved budget. When changes were made due to COVID, 5.6 FTEs were eliminated at the high school. Those positions are vacant and were assessed as to the impact in terms of class size and program offerings. Based on an analysis, all cuts made this year are sustainable and is part of the strategy for the FY'22 budget.

The FY'22 budget is built upon:

- Approved FY'21 budget--\$48,347,500
- Increase salaries for existing personnel (contractual)--\$1,262,011
- Faculty / professional position additions--7.9 FTE; \$628,000
- Faculty / professional position reductions--(9.0 FTE); (\$754,500)
- Support staff positions--4.9 FTE; \$146,000
- Net increase to various non-salary accounts--\$373,834
- Total change--3.8 FTE; \$1,655,845

Total FY'22 recommended budget: \$50,003,345

Elementary positions include 3.0 FTE Elementary General Education Teachers: \$225,000

Enrollment projections and class size charts were presented, showcasing scenarios based upon current projections and the allocation of FTEs, which would be assigned later, as the numbers at each school could change.

Other recommended elementary positions include:

- 1.2 FTE Elementary Math Specialists: \$95,000
- 1.9 FTE Elementary General Education Instructional Assistant Support: \$53,800

Middle School positions include:

- 1.0 FTE Middle School Math Specialist / Interventionist: \$75,000
- 0.4 FTE Middle School Department Heads: \$48,000

- 1.0 FTE Middle School Special Education: \$75,000

High School positions include:

- 2.0 FTE High School Academic Support: \$52,700

Mr. Donahue asked if Lateefah Franck, the district's METCO Director could present to the School Committee on the experience of Boston resident students related to school and the pandemic.

Director of Student Services Abby Hanscom presented student services positions:

- 0.3 FTE Psychologist (Hanlon): \$35,000
- 1.0 FTE Psychologist (District): \$75,000

Operations position includes:

- 1.0 FTE Custodian: \$40,000

Assistant Superintendent Allison Borchers presented non-salary changes.

- Increase in project-based learning: \$10,000
 - Plans for the return of J-Term with decreased reliance on grant funding
- Software subscriptions: \$25,000
 - Investment in online platforms to make it easy to quickly assess student progress and plan for intervention
 - Accounts for price increases in current online subscription-based services (e.g., iXL, Newsela)
- Increase Summer Academic Support Programs: \$4,500
 - Proactive summer programming for identified cohort of rising ninth grade students
- Increase in regular transportation: \$25,400
 - Contractual increases (5th year of a five-year contract)
 - Rebalanced to adjust for offsets from other funding sources
- Increase in Operations for PPE and sanitizing supplies: \$50,000
 - Assumes the need for continued use of PPE, electrostatic disinfection, and regular HVAC filter replacement

Mr. Donahue asked about the Senior Independent Project Program at the high school. Superintendent Parks responded that it was not run this year due to reduced student interest. High School Principal Amy Davenport is investigating moving the program to the summer.

Director of Student Services Abby Hanscom presented on special education.

- In FY'21, 18.7% of students receive some type of special education services
- Less than 1% of students are educated in out-of-district placements

Special education spending includes town funds, the Federal IDEA grant, and Circuit Breaker offset.

The Student Services department's focus this year has been on:

- Maintaining current programming and service levels
- Meeting legal and regulatory responsibilities
- Increasing mental health supports during the period of recovery from COVID impacts

Non-salary changes in special education include an increase in contracted services for \$85,000. These include highly specialized services and consultation required on students' IEPs, staffing

flexibility for short-term needs, enabling the district to ramp-up and staff-down efficiently. An increased need for these services is anticipated as part of COVID recovery and stabilization. Historically, based on a multi-year book back, the line has been underfunded.

Mr. Mullin asked for clarification on how this was funded in the past and the effect on accounting throughout the operating budget. Mrs. Jn-baptiste responded that the structural deficit was absorbed in revolving accounts, which is not ideal. Superintendent Parks replied that the process is to have the line reflect the actuality, without having to go to the special education reserve account.

- Planning for a 3% escalation for tuitions and budgeting for anticipated placements.
- Budget builds for known increases in transportation related to transportation contracts

Looking beyond FY'22, there are priorities that are anticipated in upcoming budget cycles, These include:

- Increase in English Language Learner staffing
- Hiring a Director of Safety and Security
- Expanding Westwood's METCO program to the elementary level
- Creating an additional preschool classroom

Mr. Donahue and Mr. Mullin spoke in support of expediting the hiring of a Director of Safety and Security. Mr. Mullin suggested that the position take effect January 1, 2022, reducing the impact on the operating budget.

The Committee spoke in favor of expanding the METCO program. Superintendent Parks indicated that she would like to discuss it more in the spring, and to use next year as a year to thoughtfully plan for the expansion.

FY'22 Capital Budget

Director of Business and Finance Lemma Jn-baptiste presented. She stated that, in FY'19 and FY'20, the total capital funding allocated from the Town was increased to invest in capital projects and FFE (furniture, fixtures, and equipment) needs. In FY'22, the total is anticipated to be the same as last year. The allocation, however, does shift, with a request to increase the HVAC and vehicles lines.

FY'22 Key Projects that will be priorities over the summer at a cost of \$500-\$600k:

- High School second floor and Preschool floor replacement
- High School HVAC glycol project to protect the HVAC system and chiller
- Schedule HVAC duct cleaning at Martha Jones and Downey
- Middle School floor repairs to elevator loading area
- Security projects that cannot be completed during school vacation weeks
- Maintenance shed project with the Recreation Department
- Air conditioning installations, as recommended by Student Services Department, based upon students' needs
- Select bathroom restorations, paving projects, gutter repair, carpeting, and hallway ceiling tile replacements.

There are capital projects that will likely be deferred unless other projects come under budget:

- Districtwide paving
- Downey basketball courts
- Sheehan basketball court
- Districtwide air conditioning installations
- Martha Jones roof repairs

- The assessment of roof conditions at Martha Jones and Sheehan are being updated. The district is ready to proceed should urgent repairs be needed.

These deferred projects total \$400k.

In technology, the district is making investments in FY'22 through a combination of funds in technology capital and the operating budget:

- Scheduled replacement of Chromebooks for grades 6 and 9
 - 450 units at \$271 per unit, totaling \$121,950
- Secondary firewall at \$32,700

In addition, the replacement of a 2006 Ford E350 van that is used by the Maintenance Department is being proposed.

Mr. Mullin stated that the Town has, in the past, been supportive of seeking additional capital funding. He asked whether anything is anticipated. There is nothing major, other than the Town's request to replace the multi-purpose field, which would be beneficial to the district.

Long-term Capital Considerations

- The Hanlon-Deerfield project timeline was reviewed. Relevant key dates include:
 - Fall 2019-present: Feasibility Study; Decision about the scope of the project; and Schematic Design
 - Spring 2021: Town Vote for bridge funding
 - Fall 2021: Town Vote for full project funding
 - July 2022: Construction starts
 - February 2024: Occupancy

The Hanlon-Deerfield School project could significantly change the elementary building portfolio and, therefore, the district's maintenance plan. If a new school is funded, there are projects that will proceed on schedule:

- Door crash bar replacements (Deerfield)
- Plumbing and bathroom repairs (Deerfield and Hanlon)
- Siding replacement in limited areas (Hanlon)
- Security updates (Deerfield and Hanlon)

Projects that may not need to be refunded:

- Floor replacements (Deerfield)
- Plumbing replacement (Hanlon)
- Roof replacement (Hanlon)
- Ceiling tile replacements (Deerfield and Hanlon)
- Other aesthetic improvements at both schools

The potential timeline for the Sheehan project was presented:

- February 2020: School Committee allocated \$30k for a high-level design study of the "remainder school"
- Beginning Spring 2021: Review design study results and project options, engage the community, and determine the project to move forward (e.g., renovation, new build, etc.)
- Spring 2023: Town vote for design funding through bidding
- Fall 2024: Town vote for full project funding
- September 2026: Occupancy

A previous study was commissioned that stated a comprehensive base repair of Sheehan would cost \$29M. Until a base repair, renovation, or new building can be completed at Sheehan, funding will be required for priority maintenance projects. Approximately \$1.8M would ensure safe and comfortable use for a period of 5-7 years, pending the permanent solution.

Mr. Mullin asked about the timing of the project. Mrs. Plotkin responded that it is all dependent upon the School Committee. The project is not going through the Massachusetts School Building Authority's (MSBA) process as it is unlikely that it would be approved as the Hanlon-Deerfield project would not have broken ground yet. Additionally, the MSBA is conscious of spreading its resources throughout the Commonwealth.

Budget and Educational Landscape

The district is weathering the pandemic thanks to careful budgeting by the Town, support with areas of declining revenue, and the use of CARES and FEMA funding to support schools with technology and PPE expenses. Staffing cuts were limited to sustainable levels. Additionally, there was no request to voters to supplement the operating budget in FY'21 from Town funds.

Superintendent Parks then presented a slide showing how Westwood's per pupil spending compares with *Boston* magazine's Top 25 High Schools from 2020. Westwood is positioned around the median of the comparison group.

Next steps in the budget process include:

- Presentation to the Finance and Warrant Commission (FinCom) on February 9
- Meeting with FinCom Education Subcommittee during the week of February 9
- School Committee budget hearing on February 11
- FinCom budget hearings throughout March
- Annual Town Meeting on May 3

Mrs. Lewis reminded residents of next week's meeting to discuss the district's proposed operating and capital budgets.

Mr. Donahue wished to again thank the district's administrators, Instructional Assistants, and Food Services employees who took no salary increase for the current year.

New Business

There was no new business.

Adjournment

MOTION made by Maya Plotkin to adjourn the meeting. Seconded by Tony Mullin.

Roll-call vote:

Mrs. Lewis: **Yes**
Mrs. Plotkin: **Yes**
Mr. Donahue: **Yes**
Mr. Mullin: **Yes**
Mrs. Phillips: **Yes**

Result: 5-0-0 – Approved

The meeting adjourned at 8:59pm.

Documents/Exhibits Used at Meeting

- Proposed FY'22 Operating Budget
- Proposed FY'22 Operating Budget slideshow presentation