

Approved March 30, 2023

**Advisory Committee Meeting
Faculty Dining Room, Wellesley Middle School
50 Kingsbury Street
Monday, March 27, 2023, 6:00 p.m.**

Those present from Advisory Committee included Shawn Baker, Doug Smith, Madison Riley, Rani Elwy, Gail Sullivan, David Prock, Bill Schauffler, Pete Pedersen, Jenn Fallon, Christina Dougherty, Wendy Paul, Susan Clapham, Neal Goins, and Andrea Ward.

Also in attendance, Ryan Daws, Precinct F Town Meeting Member (TMM); Cindy Mahr, Assistant Superintendent, Wellesley Public Schools (WPS); David Lussier, Superintendent, WPS; Leda Eizenberg, Chair, School Committee (SC).

Chair, Shawn Baker called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m.

Citizen Speak

There was no one present for Citizen Speak.

Administrative

Supplemental was completed today and contains the updates of Article 7.1 and Article 8.2

2023 ATM Warrant Articles

Ryan Daws, TMM Precinct F presented a Motion to amend Article 8, Motion 2 by removing \$2 million from the Wellesley Public Schools budget. Mr. Daws said that the Motion was based on a need to understand the budget, and he was looking at enrollment. He expressed concerns about declining enrollment and students who went into private school. He felt that the magnitude of decline dwarfs peer communities. He also expressed concerns about the number of FTEs and expressed a need to understand these numbers.

Discussion and Questions

- Mr. Daws was asked by Advisory if he had reviewed the SC presentations to Advisory and if he understood that head count is different than FTE. Mr. Daws was asked what he would cut from the school budget if it were reduced by \$2 million.
 - SC presentations to Advisory were reviewed. And the items to be cut from the budget were not determined. The \$2 million was selected as an arbitrary number and a place to start.
- An Advisory comment was made that teachers are used in other areas when sections are cut. The district uses the existing staff and adjusts as needed; for example in the high school, teachers might teach a different class.
 - It was felt that Needham has the same number of FTEs for 40% more students.
- An Advisory comment was made that WPS provides in district education and services for special education students. The number of students in a specific elementary school might decline but the district still needs to run a building.
- An Advisory comment was made with respect to the math coach questions and that the district is investing in math as test scores were declining and math improvement is something the district and parents want.
 - Middle School math was acutely affected by COVID. A math teacher was added to reduce class sizes. The math coach will work across teachers, and it is considered student facing because they are using data to inform the instruction of students.

- An Advisory comment was made that Wellesley is not number one in per pupil spending and that Weston is higher. Concern was expressed about the analysis that was done.
- An Advisory comment was made that the budget contains \$15,000 of critical needs spending and most of the budget is for teachers' salaries.
- An Advisory question was asked of the Schools as to what is the cost of the core base that won't change much if 40% more students were added. What is the infrastructure that is in place if students return?
 - The schools replied that headcount is an imperfect data point as a position might be filled with 2 people. Headcount is not a driver of cost in the budget. FTEs drive benefits.
 - Some of the largest changes in headcount are related to special education which has a higher number of TAs and paraprofessionals. Staffing costs are significant but it is far greater to educate these students in the district rather than paying for out of district services and education.
 - The elementary schools have class size guidelines. Decline in enrollment does not always allow for a contraction in sections. For example, a school might have 24 kindergarten students but there are two sections because parents prefer 2 sections of kindergarten of 12 students each. Kindergarten classes are staffed with a teacher and a teaching assistant.
 - In the high school there are many part time staff working less than 1.0. When reductions are made at the high school, the district tries to pull positions together to make one (1) position. Wellesley has a robust course selection, and many classes are small. Courses would be eliminated if staff were cut.
- An Advisory question was asked of the Schools if the town service costs related to the schools are included in the per student spending and if other towns include it? An additional question was asked if grants are also included.
 - The Schools responded that \$36 million of town supported services are reflected in the budget. All towns are required to report all funding sources to the state except trust money such as the Scholarship fund and the Stabilization fund. What varies is how each town charges its school district for these services. Some communities use averages which can result in variabilities between schools. The Town services are factored into per pupil spending. The Town provides, utilities, other services, benefits, and retirement benefits as a whole to the schools. The State website walks through how everything is reported and how per pupil spending is calculated. It is internally consistent across districts.
 - In district programming is not universal across school districts. Needham and Weston tuition students into Wellesley's robust special education programs because they do not have enough cohorts to provide their own services in-district. It would cost Wellesley \$15 million to place students out of district.
 - The district has a commitment to the community to provide special education.
 - The consolidation of schools from 7 to 6 reflects the declining enrollment. The community has indicated its commitment to neighborhood schools. When the two (2) new schools come online and Upham is closed, there will likely be larger class sizes.
- An Advisory question was asked if the course catalogue and structure of classes was reviewed in the comparison with other towns as comparisons can be challenging if there are other differences. The complexity is different.
 - Mr. Daws stated that Needham's structure was reviewed, and he expressed concern about the other positions. He stated he was looking at the aggregate and wants to pull back the money and then make the changes.
- An Advisory member expressed sympathy with Mr. Daws' point of view. However the four (4) top school districts with the most students in private schools are Wellesley, Weston, Brookline,

Newton which are also the wealthiest communities. Wellesley has the highest percentage of special education compared to communities used in the presentation. A question was asked as to why those schools were selected rather than other peer schools. Of the total spending Wellesley is #4 and the first ones are the other wealthy districts.

- Mr. Daws replied that Weston was felt to be a difficult comp because of the lower number of students. Felt young families not moving to Wellesley.
- An Advisory comment was made that the presentation stretched through COVID years. It was further commented that it is anticipated with two (2) new schools that people will come back to the schools. If dollars are cut, then class sizes go up. It is difficult to look at per pupil spending as people do compare this when making decisions on where to live.
- An Advisory question was asked of the Schools if things are structurally in place to accommodate more students.
 - The district has capacity with existing staff to accommodate students. In the consolidation from 7 to 6 schools the district wants to ensure it has bandwidth. Economics in town have played a factor in enrollment. The Nines has provided a more affordable option for families to move to Wellesley which has resulted in an increase of students. But demographic trends over the years have historically shown ups and downs.
- An Advisory comment was made that the timing of this amendment is difficult.
- An Advisory comment was made that it is difficult to understand what the \$2 million represents.
- Mr. Daws asked about the \$1.2 million for Other Temporary Staff.
 - The Schools responded that this is Intramural Stipends (about \$45K); Athletic Coaches (about \$650K); Additional Hours for TA and Paraprofessionals to support student after hours i.e. Play Practice, etc. (about \$70K); Home/Hospital Tutoring (related to Special Education) (about \$35K); Extended School Year (summer program for Special Education) (about \$309K); MCAS Science Support (about \$5K); Faculty Move Pay – Contractual (about \$25K); Summer IT Support (about \$5K).
- An Advisory comment was made that with respect to the concern over some of the roles cited in the presentation, that they are considered very important for those who teach for; example, curriculum development. It was felt that all these positions are student facing positions and they make education better.
 - Mr. Daws commented that he doesn't know what's in the line item but that he listed things that didn't feel like front line teachers.
- An Advisory comment was made that everything in the budget is student facing whether a teacher or a math coach who is working with a teacher to support the classroom.
- An Advisory question was asked as to the number of open positions?
 - It fluctuates but there are 40 positions open although the headcount would need to be confirmed as some of these positions might be part time.

Susan Clapham made, and Jenn Fallon seconded a motion for favorable action on the amendment to Article 8, Motion 2, that the Town vote to reduce the Wellesley Public Schools budget by \$2,000,000 for a revised budget of \$85,832,188.

Discussion

- A comment was made that this should have been done earlier and with more analysis. It was felt it should be brought up again with more facts and information as there are holes in the presentation. It was further commented that School Committee listens to citizen feedback and Citizen Petitions. The Advisory member can't support position of this amendment.
- A comment was made that the concern over declining enrollment and increasing costs resulted in split Advisory vote last year. It was felt that there needs to be some way to tell story. Although

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line items in the budget can't be dictated, examples of where cuts can be made should be provided.

- Support for the principle of the amended motion was expressed.
- Belief was expressed that the decisions should be left with the professionals. Some of the positions that are not understood are not bad.
- A comment was made that the School budget is more transparent than it has been in the past. It is filled with educational components. Concern was expressed with just cutting the money. It was felt that the educational professionals should be trusted.
- A comment was made that the budget is extremely detailed and is structured according to state requirements. A suggestion was made to work with the School Committee to see if there might be some way of incentivizing stakeholders to achieve some of the cost savings and efficiencies sought by Mr. Daws.

Advisory recommends unfavorable action on the amendment to Article 8, Motion 2, 12 to 1.

Adjourn

Jenn Fallon made, and Christina Dougherty seconded a motion to adjourn.

The meeting was adjourned at 10:30 p.m.

Meeting Documents Reviewed

<https://www.wellesley.ma.gov/DocumentCenter/Index/2038>

- WPS Budget Presentation by Ryan Daws