

DUDLEY-CHARLTON REGIONAL SCHOOL DISTRICT

Approved minutes of the meeting of the Dudley-Charlton Regional School Committee, Special Meeting on Budget, Thursday, February 8, 2018, Shepherd Hill Regional High School, 68 Dudley-Oxford Road, Dudley, MA 01571, 6:30 p.m.

In attendance were members of the School Committee:

Mary N. Antocci
Pauline J. Aucoin, Chair
Raymond J. Chalk, Vice Chair, arrived at 6:42 p.m.
Catherine M. Kabala
Elaine M. Rabbitt

Joseph M. Pietrzak and Stephanie A. Reed were not in attendance.

Also in attendance were Gregg J. Desto, Superintendent of Schools, Richard J. Mathieu, Director of Finance and Operations; district staff: Angela Muller Crone; Greg Balukonis, Dudley Town Administrator; John Grondalski, Charlton Finance Committee.

I. Call to Order

The chair called the meeting to order at 6:37 p.m.

II. Pledge of Allegiance

III. Approval of Warrant

There were no warrants distributed this evening.

IV. New Business

A. FY 2018 Budget Update – Mr. Mathieu

Mr. Mathieu said as mentioned at past meetings, unanticipated expenses have put some line items in the warning area, particularly transportation. As an update, Mr. Mathieu reported that a foster care situation has been resolved and the transportation costs eliminated by \$80,000.

B. Budget and Finance Subcommittee Update

This item was tabled as the topics will be covered under Item c.

C. FY 2019 Budget (Vote required)

The budget was designed with two potential scenarios:

- A \$2.9 million increase, all of which are in the assessments to the towns.
- A \$3.3 million increase.

Mr. Mathieu shared the good news that the bus contract bids returned with a 5% increase instead of the anticipated 10%. In addition, Group Benefits Strategies has agreed at this time the district is safe in assuming a 4% increase instead of 6%.

The budgets presented this evening include requests from the schools' line items resulting in total district assessments of \$3,087,988. Mr. Desto said this will allow the district to maintain its three year plan of program implementation. He said he recognizes this is a lot of money, and possibly the biggest increase the committee has ever requested. Mr. Desto said as uncomfortable as he is with what this increase does to our neighbors, he is more uncomfortable not doing what we need to do for our students.

Mr. Desto said if we are were able to secure the override, it would support the STEM program, the focus on social-emotional support, upgrades to technology infrastructure at the elementary schools, (phase I), two integration specialists/technology teachers, and an emphasis on project based learning. This will be the professional development theme for the 2018-2019 school year.

Mrs. Antocci asked if there is a lesser need to look at the infrastructure at Shepherd Hill in 2019. Mr. Desto said while the need is not less, we have to prioritize. It is hoped that a successful statement of interest for the Shepherd Hill roof can be packaged with a debt exclusion for technology. Mr. Desto said there is no negative impact to Shepherd Hill students by waiting another year, as they have wireless, and can do the things they need to do.

Mrs. Rabbitt expressed concern about the requirement for Shepherd Hill to be capable of online testing in 2019, and to participate in online learning.

Mrs. Antocci said her concerns are we won't have the capability for cybersecurity and project based learning. This will require technology, particularly at the high school level to prepare them for college and career. Mrs. Antocci requested an update on our technological capabilities from Technology Director Dan D'Arcangelo. Mrs. Antocci said we need to put in some of those required pieces now.

The budget does not include any provisions for cybersecurity. This will be on the agenda of the Feb. 14 meeting.

Mrs. Rabbitt said it is important to talk about it this now to get a picture about what the technology budget will and will not accomplish.

Mr. Desto said we are covered for online testing at Shepherd Hill, with access points spread throughout the building.

Mrs. Rabbitt said she would not focus on adding the position of Director of College and Career in FY 2020, but would include items that have a more global impact on all the students, such as an integration specialist for students and staff. This will address an unmet need.

The proposed budget also increases its use of Reserves to cover the deficit in school choice and charter school assessments incurred by more students going out of district. MR. Desto agreed work on polling those families to find out why they are sending their children out of district.

The budget must also cover unexpected cost increases from special education out of district tuitions and contracted services.

The proposed total district assessment of \$3,087,988, would be split as follows:

\$1.543 for Charlton

\$1.544 for Dudley

Mrs. Kabala said the budget and finance subcommittee meeting agreed to keep the override figure under \$3 million. She said if we hit \$3 million we will turn people off. She suggested lowering the request by the amount saved in fixed costs, or to \$2.6 million.

Mrs. Rabbitt said the word consensus may be misleading. Mrs. Reed wanted to seek more than \$3 million. Mrs. Rabbitt said it is very hard to say but she is giving up on believing we can offer all that we would like to have for our students due to the limitations of revenue growth for our two towns. She said we need to strive to be the best district we can but we will not be able to provide all that we need for our kids. Mrs. Rabbitt said she is frustrated that we are continually working from a position of what we think we can get approved by the town voters and not what we need because it does not get us ahead.

She said the committee needs to educate the voters on what we need, and to put the figure out there and let voters decide. Mrs. Rabbitt said although she does not agree with how the additional assessments will be used, she agrees with the number.

Mr. Balukonis said the number is a little high. Mr. Balukonis said the town of Dudley is 71% compared to our peer communities, which include Auburn, Charlton Douglas, Webster, Leicester, and others. Mr. Balukonis said the town cannot afford to support any request without an override, which, he estimates, will raise taxes by 13-14 %.

Mrs. Rabbitt said neither town can support the request for the minimum local contribution. Dudley cannot support governmental services.

Mr. Grondalski was asked to provide information about the discussion on the Charlton Finance Committee, and said the board is waiting for the committee to provide specific figures.

Mr. Balukonis said the towns need a formal letter of request with the amount and a record of the committee's vote. The Dudley Board of Selectmen meets on Feb. 26. The Charlton Finance Committee meets on the 24th, and the Charlton Board of Selectmen on the 27th.

Mr. Desto said the committee will vote on the 14th.

A motion was made by E. Rabbitt, seconded by M. Antocci to approve an override figure of \$3,087,988, which will result in an increase to the assessments to both towns.

Mrs. Rabbitt amended her motion.

A motion by E. Rabbitt, seconded by M. Antocci to seek an increased assessment to the towns totaling \$3,087,988, with an assessment to Charlton of \$1,543,655, and to Dudley of \$1,544,333, and this was approved by unanimous vote.

A motion by C. Kabala, seconded by R. Chalk to instruct the superintendent to send this formal request for an override to fund the towns' increased assessment, and to include the date and hours of the requested election, with suggested ballot language, was approved by unanimous vote.

Mrs. Rabbitt suggested Mr. Desto contact the Massachusetts Association of Regional Schools for advice.

V. Meeting Dates

School Committee Meetings:

- Wednesday, February 14, Shepherd Hill Regional High School, 7 p.m.
- Wednesday, February 28, 2018, Charlton Middle School, 7 p.m.
- *Budget and Finance Subcommittee* - TBA

Mrs. Rabbitt provided an update on legislative action that may impact budgets and finance going forward. Senator Sonia Chang Diaz is moving forward on Senate Bill 203 legislation to modernize the foundation budget formula.

Senate Bill 217 filed by Senator Harriett Chandler to form a commission to study the regional school district budgets, got a boost from State Auditor Suzanne Bump as she urged districts to advocate strongly for this study. Ms. Bump told the group, this is your time to try and get that commission established. There are 58 regional school districts in the state. Mrs. Rabbitt said we need to push.

VI. Adjourn

A motion by M. Antocci, seconded by R. Chalk to adjourn the meeting, was approved by unanimous vote at 8:14 p.m.

Items used for this meeting included: Agenda for Thursday, February 8, 2018; Memo of Feb. 2, 2018; 2018-2019 Budget Summary.

Respectfully submitted by Sandra Sullivan, recording secretary