

MINUTES OF THE SPECIAL WOODBRIDGE BOARD OF EDUCATION MEETING

Monday, April 3, 2017

District Office Conference Room

CALL TO ORDER: Ms. Hamilton, Chair called the meeting to order at 6:34 PM.

BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT: Ms. Margaret Hamilton, Chair; Dr. Steve Fleischman, Vice Chair; Ms. Lisa Connor, Secretary; Ms. Karen Kravetz; Mr. Garrett Luciani, Ms. Nancy Maasbach, Ms. Keri Matthews, Ms. Emily Melnick and Ms. Lynn Piascyk.

STAFF: Mr. Robert Gilbert, Superintendent. The Board received an update regarding safety and security.

MOTION #1 – EXECUTIVE SESSION

Move that we enter Executive Session (6:34 PM).

Ms. Matthews

Second by Ms. Piascyk

UNANIMOUS

MOTION #2 – PUBLIC SESSION

Move that we return to Public Session (7:08 PM).

Ms. Kravetz

Second by Ms. Matthews

UNANIMOUS

CALL TO ORDER: Ms. Hamilton, Chair called the Public Session back to order at 7:14 PM.

BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT: Ms. Margaret Hamilton, Chair; Dr. Steve Fleischman, Vice Chair; Ms. Lisa Connor, Secretary; Ms. Karen Kravetz; Mr. Garrett Luciani, Ms. Nancy Maasbach, Ms. Keri Matthews, Ms. Emily Melnick and Ms. Lynn Piascyk.

STAFF: Mr. Robert Gilbert, Superintendent; Al Pullo, Director of Business Services/Operations; Gina Prisco, Principal; Analisa Sherman, Assistant Principal; Clare Kennedy, Special Services Director and Marsha DeGennaro, Clerk of the Board.

MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC: Aimee Meacham, PTO; Maria Kayne, BOS Liaison; Linda Acheson, Jill Brostrom, Melissa Caporossi, Megan Cofrancesco, James Crawford, Larissa Crocco, Maria DePalma, Christine Domschine, Joanne Giaquinto, Wendy Glynn, Amanda Janicki, Stacey Katz, Lauren Kenefick, Vinny Lynch, Monique MacDonald, Morgan McClain, Doreen Merrill, Jean Molot, Teresa Nakouzi, Lori Patrick, Jane Roddy, Laura Sexton, Debra Sokol, Danielle Ulacco, Ashley Wagner and Cathy Zdrowski, BRS Staff; Tony Anastasio, Jessica Artemchuk, Monica Cavallaro, Joe Dey, Dan Esposito, Maegan Genovese, Anne Herlihy, Jeff Hughes, Marge Kanyusik, Kate McMillan, Joi Prud'homme, Michelle Wachsmann, Sarah Wislocki, community.

The Board provided a recap of meetings and actions by them as well as the Town Board of Finance. Previous reductions in the 2017/18 budget made by the Board of Education at their March 20 and 22 meetings include \$100,000 in technology deferment, elimination of one full-time teacher assistant (\$35,519) and one part-time custodial (\$26,410) position. In addition to these reductions, \$127,000 was allocated for funding of a School Resource Officer (SRO) for the 2017/18 school year. These reductions were in response to specific actions by the Board of Finance inclusive of a directive specifying funding of an SRO in the education budget. In addition, at the March 27 meeting the Town Board of Finance requested additional reductions in the amount of \$165,071.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Joi Prud'homme – expressed concern among parents regarding the additional budget cuts as well as retaining the SRO. Many parents are willing to pay additional taxes to maintain the status quo and find it odd that the SRO was cut from the police budget and now reductions have to be made in the BRS education budget to fund the position. It was suggested that all reductions and funding for the SRO be placed on a referendum and allow the community to have a say for what should be.

Linda Acheson – voiced support for maintaining two full-time art teacher positions and identified specific events that would be suffer as a result of reducing one art teacher position to part-time. She urged the Board to explore other alternatives to identify savings.

Jess Artemchuk – representing a group of BRS parents, urged the Board to conduct a zero-based analysis to determine cost savings that do not eliminate the SRO or staff. The Board was asked to request that the Town place these issues on a referendum for the community to decide. Parents are willing to attend meetings and voice opinions to avoid these types of budget reductions. It should not have to be an “all or nothing” approach. We live in a changed world. The presence of an SRO makes a difference and we should be growing the level of services offered not reducing them.

Kate McMillan – noted the lack of communication between leadership, town government and residents. People are invested in the town and are disappointed with the lack of discourse and options available. Parents should not have to choose keeping children safe at the expense of teaching and program reductions. Alternatives need to be explored and identified. She asked members of the Board, running for re-election, to voice their position on these issues to ensure that parents have the opportunity to make an informed decision in May.

Dan Esposito – indicated that Woodbridge is the 25th wealthiest municipality in the state and to have the SRO as part of its staff would incur 1/10 of 1% of the mill rate, approximately \$30.00/year. It is absurd that the Board has been tasked with doing more with less and the cuts are not necessary or reasonable. Schools, churches, malls and movie theaters are soft targets today. Parents do not want to be in a position of waiting for an officer to arrive at the scene; they want a deterrent for every minute of the day. We pay the people in charge of Town finances and it needs to be made to clear to them that making these cuts is not necessary.

Marge Kanyusik – acknowledged the efforts of the Board members and the difficult job they are vested with. Parents need to attend the Town Preliminary Budget Hearing on April 17 and voice their concerns. The community needs to pull together. This is an affluent community and the choice should not be protection versus teachers.

Superintendent Gilbert outlined various reduction options to fulfill the requirements set forth by the Town Board of Finance. The identified cuts have the least impact on children, programming and staff.

Option 1 - Funding a full-time security officer (\$45,714) and the following reductions:

| | | |
|----------------------------------|----------|--|
| Professional Development | \$7,100 | <i>Elimination of Tri-State Participation 2017/18</i> |
| Subscriptions/Supplies/Resources | \$9,991 | <i>Library Books/Resource Books/Supplies/Consumables</i> |
| Art teacher 0.6 FTE | \$26,694 | |
| Library/Media Spec. 0.5 FTE | \$40,000 | |

Option 2 - Funding a part-time security officer (\$22,908) and the following reductions:

| | | |
|----------------------------------|----------|--|
| Professional Development | \$7,100 | <i>Elimination of Tri-State Participation 2017/18</i> |
| Subscriptions/Supplies/Resources | \$11,185 | <i>Library Books/Resource Books/Supplies/Consumables</i> |
| Art teacher 0.6 FTE | \$26,694 | |
| Library/Media Spec. 0.8 FTE | \$16,000 | |

Option 3 - Maintaining a full-time SRO (\$127,000) and the following reductions:

| | | |
|------------------------------------|----------|--|
| Professional Development | \$7,100 | <i>Elimination of Tri-State Participation 2017/18</i> |
| Subscriptions/Supplies/Resources | \$10,094 | <i>Library Books/Resource Books/Supplies/Consumables</i> |
| Art teacher 0.6 FTE | \$26,694 | |
| Library/Media Specialist 1.0 FTE | \$80,072 | |
| Teacher Assistant 0.6 FTE | \$19,911 | |
| Summer Program Charge for Security | \$21,200 | <i>Shared between Extended Day / Summer Enrichment</i> |

Option 4 - Elimination of the \$127,000 SRO funding and the following reductions:

| | | |
|----------------------------------|----------|--|
| Professional Development | \$7,100 | <i>Elimination of Tri-State Participation 2017/18</i> |
| Subscriptions/Supplies/Resources | \$11,345 | <i>Library Books/Resource Books/Supplies/Consumables</i> |
| Art teacher becomes 0.7 FTE | \$19,626 | |

Ms. Hamilton, Chair called a brief recess (8:00 PM). Meeting called back to order (8:06 PM).

Superintendent Gilbert indicated that in each of the reductions of the art teacher and Library Media Specialist positions, all mandated requirements would still be met. The loss would occur in teacher planning, collaboration and enrichment activities. The additional reduction of a teacher assistant to 0.6 FTE would necessitate restructuring TA resources throughout the building to meet individual needs of students.

Discussion ensued regarding the timing of the cuts, frustration with the overall process, the lack of communication, the vast array of unanswered questions and being forced to choose between security and educating children. The fact remains, that special education costs are spiraling out of control, technology has been removed from the capital budget and if we want to maintain an SRO, we need to find a total of \$327,000 in the budget that is simply not there.

There was general consensus that funding for police and education should be separate and distinct. It is hoped that individuals will attend the Preliminary Budget Hearing, share their opinions and ultimately vote the budget down. Sentiment existed for some form of security but not at the expense of programming for children.

MOTION #1 – FULL-TIME SECURITY OFFICER

Move that we rescind the funding of \$127,000 for an SRO and approve reductions in the 2017/18 budget in the amount of \$83,785 as presented by administration and allocate funding in the amount of \$45,714 for a full-time security officer.

Ms. Kravetz
Second by Ms. Piascyk
IN FAVOR: Dr. Fleischman, Ms. Hamilton, Ms. Kravetz
OPPOSED: Mr. Luciani, Ms. Matthews, Ms. Melnick and Ms. Piascyk
ABSTAIN: Ms. Connor, Ms. Maasbach

MOTION FAILS 3-4-2

MOTION #2 – PART-TIME SECURITY OFFICER

Move that we rescind the funding of \$127,000 for an SRO and approve reductions in the 2017/18 budget in the amount of \$60,979 as presented by administration and allocate funding in the amount of \$22,908 for a part-time security officer.

Ms. Hamilton
Second by Ms. Connor
IN FAVOR: Dr. Fleischman, Ms. Hamilton and Mr. Luciani
OPPOSED: Ms. Kravetz, Ms. Matthews, Ms. Melnick and Ms. Piascyk
ABSTAIN: Ms. Connor and Ms. Maasbach

MOTION FAILS 3-4-2

MOTION #3 – NO SECURITY

Move that we rescind the funding of \$127,000 for an SRO and approve reductions in the 2017/18 budget in the amount of \$38,071 as presented by administration.

Dr. Fleischman
Second by Mr. Luciani
IN FAVOR: Dr. Fleischman, Mr. Luciani
OPPOSED: Ms. Kravetz, Ms. Maasbach, Ms. Matthews, Ms. Melnick and Ms. Piascyk
ABSTAIN: Ms. Hamilton and Ms. Connor

MOTION FAILS 2-5-2

MOTION #4 – LETTER TO PARENTS, BOS AND BOF

Move that we write a letter to parents, Boards of Finance and Selectmen advising them we do not support this budget, and are not comfortable making additional cuts, request that funding for the SRO be added back, and if the budget is eventually voted, we will decide then how we will spend the funding allocation.

Dr. Fleischman
Second by Ms. Piascyk
WITHDRAWN

MOTION #5 – NO SECURITY

Move that we rescind the funding of \$127,000 for an SRO and approve reductions in the 2017/18 budget inclusive of a 0.6 FTE Art teacher and a Library Media Specialist at 0.4 FTE Library Media Specialist and allocate funding in the amount of

\$30,000 for a part-time security officer with a charge back to the summer programs.

Ms. Hamilton
Second by Ms. Kravetz

IN FAVOR: Ms. Hamilton
OPPOSED: Ms. Connor, Dr. Fleischman, Mr. Luciani Ms. Matthews, Ms. Melnick and Ms. Piascyk
ABSTAIN: Ms. Kravetz, Ms. Maasbach

MOTION FAILS 1-6-2

The Board was reminded that eventually they will need to reconcile the budget and regardless of the action this evening, that the Town Board of Finance has reduced the 2017/18 budget by \$200,000 and funding for an SRO is \$127,000. Caution was urged in making decisions that may not allow for the funding of some type of security in the coming year. The budget will be a work in progress and it may be possible that other options could develop over time. If the Board chooses not to act this evening, it will be a disservice to everyone who will vote at the Town meeting since they will not know where the cuts are and what is affected. Board members were adamant that too many questions remained unanswered and they were being forced into decisions that would impact the quality of education without time for thoughtful deliberation.

While there appears to be some level of agreement for not reducing staff at the expense of funding the SRO, by refusing to make additional cuts they are abdicating their responsibility to the taxpayer. The recommendations made by the Superintendent have the least impact on student programs and the Board should support those recommendations. It was also noted that the Board has consistently saved the Town money over the last seven years. Education is what the Town has invested in, the reason people move into the Town and these reductions are inappropriate cuts to education and would have a minimal mill rate increase. Concern was expressed for not knowing the specifics of what the \$19,626 would entail, since reductions have already been identified.

MOTION #6 – NO SECURITY / NO STAFF REDUCTIONS

Move that we authorize reductions that include elimination of funding the SRO, \$7,100 in professional development, \$11,345 in books/supplies/subscriptions/resources, and direct administration to identify non-personnel reductions in the amount of \$19,626 to achieve the \$200,000.

Ms. Matthews
Second by Mr. Luciani
IN FAVOR: Ms. Hamilton, Dr. Fleischman, Mr. Luciani, Ms. Matthews, Ms. Melnick and
Ms. Piascyk
OPPOSED: Ms. Connor and Ms. Kravetz
ABSTAIN: Ms. Maasbach

MOTION PASSES 6-2-1

It was suggested that the Board take a firm position regarding these reductions.

MOTION #7– LETTER BOS/BOF/PARENTS

Move that we send a letter to parents, Boards of Selectmen and Finance clearly outlining our opposition to the budget cuts and the removal of the SRO and ask that the cuts be reinstated and the funding of the SRO continued.

Dr. Fleischman
Second by Ms. Matthews
IN FAVOR: Ms. Connor, Dr. Fleischman, Mr. Luciani, Ms. Kravetz, Ms. Matthews, Ms. Melnick
and Ms. Piascyk
OPPOSED: Ms. Hamilton

MOTION PASSES 6-2-1

MOTION TO ADJOURN: (9:00 PM)
Dr. Fleischman
Second by Ms. Kravetz
UNANIMOUS

Recorded by Marsha DeGennaro, Clerk of the Board