



Town of Concord
Finance Committee – Guidelines Subcommittee
Meeting Minutes – February 4, 2021

Present: Ray Andrews, Dean Banfield, Kathy Cuocolo, Mary Hartman, John Hickling, Dee Ortner, Christine Reynolds, Phil Swain, Brian Taylor, Lois Wasoff, Wade Rubenstein, and Andrea Zall

Absent: Richard Jamison

Others Present: Select Board Chair Linda Escobedo; Select Board Member Terri Ackerman; School Committee Members Cynthia Rainey, Fatima Mezdad and Court Booth, Dr. Laurie Hunter, Superintendent of Schools, Jared Stanton, Director of Finance, Town Manager Stephen Crane; and Chief Financial Officer Kerry Lafleur

Open Meeting

Ms. Reynolds called the meeting to order at 7:05 pm with a roll call vote, with the following voting in the affirmative: Reynolds, Hartman, Zall, Ortner, Hickling, Banfield, Swain, Cuocolo, Taylor and Rubenstein. The meeting was held via Zoom using the Webinar format, and broadcast via MMN. She noted that the meeting was being recorded.

Approval of Minutes

Ms. Reynolds opened a discussion of the Minutes of the meeting of January 21st. She noted her recommendation to correct the .68 mentioned on page to, to .645 as the correct number. Secondly, she asked to correct Mr. Banfield’s comment was not regarding COLA but rather SGR. It was determined not to vote on the minutes as not all committee members had received in a timely manner for appropriate review.

Superintendents Response to Preliminary FY22 Guidelines

Dr. Hunter opened by stating that the schools had completed their first pass at the FY22 budget. She stated that it was higher than they would like to see and it will go down. This draft had been presented to the School Committee on February 2nd. Dr. Hunter than turned the presentation over to Jared Stanton, Director of Finance.

Mr. Stanton began with an overview of the timeline from first draft of the budget to approval at the annual Town Meeting. Ms. Reynolds asked about the interaction of the Finance Committee’s developing its recommended guideline and the School Committee approving the Superintendent’s proposed budget. A discussion ensued with Mr. Banfield, Ms. Hartman and Dr. Hunter about that timing. Dr. Hunter noted the uncertainties of the future school operations as it relates to the covid protocols. Therefore, it was agreed that the two committee would work closely together.

Next was a review of the Budget Assumptions, the majority of which center around hybrid learning, remote learning, need for substitutes all of which are and will be impacted by the Covid pandemic and its safety protocols.

The review of FY22 preliminary vs FY 21 indicated a 4.35% increase which Mr. Stanton indicated would be coming down. In particular the salary line would be reduced as the appropriate salaries would be offset with Title I and Metco grant monies. A discussion ensued regarding teachers' salaries and negotiated COLAs, steps, lanes and longevity features. Ms. Reynolds asked if Dr. Hunter or Mr. Stanton could provide a breakdown of the number of teachers that are outside of the steps/lane categories and only receiving annual COLA adjustments.

The budget review continued on other budget drivers and offsets. Of particular interest was the decrease of \$406,851 in the cost of Special Education resulting when students are taught "in region" versus being sent out of town. The gains are keenly noted in both the social benefits to the student and the community. In a wrap up on the CPS Budget Mr. Banfield inquired about the impact of dollars provided to the schools from the CARES Act. Mr. Stanton noted that they were indeed helpful this current year but are not reflected or recurring into FY22.

Town Managers Response to Preliminary FY22 Guidelines

Stephen Crane, Town Manager began the presentation turning the podium over to Kerry LaFleur, Chief Financial Officer. Ms. LaFleur gave an overview of where the town budget had been in FY19 and what was approved for FY21 versus FY21 which was downwardly adjusted by \$1.1 million to make up for the decrease in town revenue due to Covid closures. She went on to then review the Budget drivers identified for FY22 - Covid, Cybersecurity, Service level increases and inflation. The change to remote work and the support of remote town committee meetings, required hardware and software investments to be a new integral part of our infrastructure. Upgrades in cybersecurity are also a part of that changing environment.

The first pass FY22 Budget requests an increase of \$1,889,161 a 6.74% increase which is \$1,381,009. over guideline. Ms. LeFleur and Mr. Crane walked the Committee through an analysis of the overage where they identified \$536,461 for cybersecurity, shortfall in parking meter revenue and staff for the library expansion that they would like the Committee to grant an addition to guideline. This would leave a remaining overage of \$844,549 for the town to work through and seek reductions to balance the budget to guideline. Questions were raised by Ms. Hartman and Mr. Andrews concerning the budget for legal expenses and the need to have clear information for town meeting on the content of that line item.

At 9:20 pm, on a **MOTION** made by Ms. Hartman and seconded by Mr. Patel, and on a roll call vote (with Andrews, Banfield, Cuocolo, Hartman, Hickling, Ortner, Patel, Reynolds, Swain, Taylor, Wasoff and Zall all voting in the affirmative), it was **VOTED** to adjourn the meeting and return to the regular Finance Committee meeting.

Respectfully submitted

Kathy Cuocolo

