

BUDGET ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEETING

Finance Committee / Board of Selectmen – Hybrid Meeting

Wednesday March 23, 2022 – 4:30 PM

PRESENT: Neal Pilson, Chair Board of Selectmen; Alan Hanson, Selectman; Roger Manzolini, Selectman; Danielle Fillio, Town Administrator; Bob Gniadek, Chair Finance Cte.; Steve Patterson, Finance Cte.; Pat Callahan, Finance Cte.; Bob Youdelman, Finance Cte. via Zoom; Peter Dillon, School Super.; Ina Wilhelm, School Cte.; Sharon Harrison, Business Mgr.

Peter opened the meeting with an explanation of how the school was able to get the budget reduction very close to the requested amount. Sharon then spoke to the details:

School Committee Expenses – An initial increase of \$4,000 was reduced to \$2,500. That will pay for at least one or two members of the Committee to attend the Massachusetts Conference for professional development.

Principal's Expenses reduced to only cover his membership in the Principals' Association.

Pupil Supplies – Proposed increase reduced in half to \$1,000. Special Education was reduced by \$2,000 from last year. The budgeted amount will meet Mass. Core Curriculum requirements.

Professional Services and Fees - \$20,000 request was reduced to \$17,500. There was talk last year about increasing that to \$25,000, for the organizations that bring enrichment programs into the school. But the proposed amount will not impact educational opportunities and there are grants being pursued to increase those opportunities. There was a discussion of whether there were organizations that would provide those programs without fees. The Richmond Cultural Council subsidizes some of them, some are supported by other grants, for example the Audubon Society presentation was partially underwritten by a grant. Some volunteers also provide free programs.

The subject of Tuition fees to other districts generated a discussion of School Choice, and Tuition Out expenses and the income from School Choice and Tuition. The amounts vary with each different situation and each high school district has a separate set fee for tuition.

Custodian Salaries – Originally requested one full-time day position and one and one-half night positions. That has been reduced to one full-time day and two part-time night positions, a decrease of \$10,000 from the original request.

Salaries, Benefits and Transportation: A Student Activity Administrator and Regular Education Professional Services and Fees. The contingency for salary increases, post contract negotiations, has been reduced by \$10,000.

FY'23 Revenue Table: School Choice – An extensive discussion of the accounting system used by Sharon generated many questions concerning the Circuit Breaker reimbursement of Special Ed

costs, and how those and other government funds are received and how they are used. It was explained that the ESSER funds are not reflected in the budget because they are earmarked for specific uses and must be budgeted separately.

Sharon explained the philosophy behind her specific budgeting system and why it needs to be done differently than a Town budget that can depend on a stable tax income as opposed to the fluid possibilities of the number of students, Choice and residential, both in terms of income and outlay.

Roger asked whether if there were no Choice students would there be the same number of teachers. He was advised that, unless the numbers fell out so that two grades could be combined, the incremental cost of each additional student is incidental.

A discussion of whether the Town is required to offer a free Pre-K program, resulted in discussing whether the Town should do an integrated Pre-K program that included other children as “buddies” or to provide special services to the special needs children, which is required, and no regular Pre-K program. The integrated program is a much better solution despite the high salary of the Pre-K teacher.

Bob Gniadek asked what can be done to control constantly increasing salaries and expenses. Peter suggested looking at changing the health insurance program for the school and the Town, which would offer a savings for the school of \$80,000 and for the Town of \$130,000.

Sharon suggested that the group look at creating a three-to-five-year anticipated budget so that there is some advance awareness of what may be coming down the road. Peter noted that Richmond’s desire to remain an independent and autonomous district comes with a price. Perhaps that should be looked at again as there are savings to be had. Peter will go back to the School Committee to see if there is any way they can reduce the bottom line of the budget. If they can find some changes, they will send those to Danielle.

There being no other business before the Committee there was a move to adjourn the meeting at 6:03. The motion was seconded and adopted by unanimous consent.