

TOWN OF FOXBOROUGH

ADVISORY COMMITTEE

MINUTES

January 31st, 2018

Committee Members Present: Bernard Dumont, Thom Freeman, Seth Ferguson, Jennifer Frank-Bonnet, Sue Dring, Michelle Raymond, Sean McCarthy, Larry Ooi, Stephanie McGowan, Robert Canfield, Brent Ruter.

Members Absent: Sharon Weiskerger.

Others Present: Randy Scollins, Lisa Sinkus, Virginia Coppola, Bill Yukna, Christina Belanger, Amy Berdos, Alison Mello, Marilyn Weiss.

The meeting was brought to order at 7:08 PM by Bernard Dumont. Bernard addressed the Advisory Committee (ADCOM) and welcomed the members of the School Committee (SCOM) and School Department. He restated some of the remaining budget scheduling, and reminded the community of the April 3rd due date for write ups. SCOM made a motion to open their meeting.

7:10 PM School Department Budget Review. Superintendent Amy Berdos, Assistant Superintendent Allison Mello, and School Department Business Administrator Bill Yukna presented the ADCOM with the School Department's budget request. Bill provided documents breaking down all of the department's financials for the past few years, and described all of the components of the cash flow. Bill stated that salary is the biggest portion of the budget. He explained adjustments based on IEPs, class size goals, and state mandates. Michelle drew attention to the FTE designator and what it meant, and Bill showed the number of staff along with the FTEs to show the difference. Amy explained that there are no new programs on the whole, but there is a growing focus on ELLs in order to meet state's mandated service delivery. Michelle explained ELL means teaching students working English as a second language. Amy explained that a law changed in the monitoring of ELL proficiency progress from five year to two years status updates. Sean inquired hypothetically that if any corporations had employees come to work in Foxborough, if schools would be impacted. Bill responded in the affirmative and that it would also include individuals displaced from other countries or US territories that have suffered a natural disaster or civil upheaval. The schools are mandated to provide services for these individuals by law. Superintendent Berdos stated that the schools thoroughly review scheduling to respond to attendance/enrollment needs and shift personnel resources effectively. The Superintendent also explained that recent census data led to reduction in grants. Thom inquired what the driver was behind the grant reductions. Amy explained that the census data reflected a change in the social-economic level of the town. Michelle remarked that census data is subjective and unreliable due to self-reporting. Amy stated that the department makes sure that scheduling and case load is thoroughly reviewed.

Bill provided housing data which could lead to an increase in enrollment in future years. Sean inquired how the department predicted enrollment with this kind of data. Bill stated that there is no specific formula, and instead looks at the district layout to prepare accordingly.

Superintendent Berdos explained that a focus on mental health was driving staffing change. She explained that children coming into the community with IEPs are federally mandated to have continued IEP service in their new town. Jennifer asked if the guidance counselors, social workers, aids and psychologists had job overlaps. Amy described that each handle a piece of the total mental health and wellbeing of students, and while there is overlap it is designed to make sure nothing falls through the cracks. Bill remarked that during his time social issues were not a primary focus, but now awareness is key. Assistant Superintendent Alison Mello reported that social-emotional issues impact on learning research has increased over the years, driving new methodologies in staffing and policy making. Bill explained the permutations of learning through grade levels, subjects, and class sizes. Amy and Bill discussed how the needs of the students drive their budget.

Bernard stated that at the strategic, or big picture, level there was an average annual increase in the school department budget of 3% every year. Bernard hypothesized that, based on the current trend, in five years the budget would increase from \$32,000,000 to \$36,000,000, and in ten years to \$42,000,000. Bernard advised the committee that, while the schools perform admirably, the ADCOM should treat their budget like any other town budget to be fair in limiting increases. Sean asked how the schools gaged their pace relative to public's ability to pay for its increases. Bill stated that the schools are within a competitive industry in regards to salary, and one that is heavily regulated by state and federal mandates. Bill stated that if there is a downward trend then resources would be evaluated and eliminated based on the need.

Seth asked what the soft cap on class size was, to which Bill stated that 24 students in a class was comfortable and that the schools can flex up to a higher level if needed. Seth purposed this bottom up detail approach as an alternative to top down regulation, as class sizes can grow and not demand new staff. Sean and Bill discussed losing personnel at Burrell and Taylor and the net numbers. Michelle remarked that many of the increases are due to state mandates with little local control over spending, and that all of this needs to be changed at the state level. Bill stated that the schools are very reactive to the public need. Bernard again readdressed the need for impartiality for the school committee budget, and to reflect on whether or not the town is happy with the investments made in the school system to be used as guide posts for determining recommendations. Sean discussed the only way to adjust the growth of the salary line for the schools, in regards to reports given to the ADCOM by the School Department, showing a 35% increase over 10 years, would be through reducing the COLA as the step amounts can't be changed.

Stephanie asked, as a mother with a child in the school system, what would happen if a teacher underperformed and what the process was for removing them from the system. Bill declined to answer to avoid breaching conflict of interest regulations. Amy responded generally that there are standards and procedures in place. Sean asked if the schools evaluated coaches. Amy stated that the department does, however they try to have coaches on teacher staff to help with those evaluations and standard keeping.

9:19 PM SCOM closed its meeting.

9:21 PM Budget Discussions. Bernard briefed the ADCOM on the schedule going forward. Brent advocated collating questions and sending them to liaisons to have a dialogue with their departments. Brent suggested asking Roger for more info on his requests before calling him in. Larry stated that the main issue was due to not having enough supervisors to laborers in the field for the DPW questions.

Stephanie remarked having a round table discussion on the 5 positions requested from DPW, stating the request was hard to digest. She asked why there was need for a tech at level 5. Sean suggested keeping an eye on growth in Police-Fire-DPW.

Rob, returning to Brent's original thought suggested preparing the departments they want to have come back first by putting them in contact with their liaison. Sean pointed out three new hires in the fire department and asked Virginia Coppola what the Board of Selectman's thoughts were on those hires. Virginia stated the hires were through a grant for three years, and while the BOS was not required to keep them after that point Virginia stated that the Town Finance Director projected that by that time there would be no significant impact to the budget.

10:09 PM Bernard stepped out, Sue became acting Chair.

10:10 PM Continued Budget Discussions. Seth stated that he disagreed philosophically with Randy and Bill's cash cushions to keep spending down in department budgets. Seth purposed a different way to handle this issue through reallocations and keeping a lean approach. Sue remarked that the money will get spent if that approach was taken. Seth stated he wanted more transparency in the process. Brent remarked that the process is opaque, and Michelle remarked that she doesn't want to engender a culture of "spend it or lose it." Seth remarked that the town should budget correctly in that case.

Stephanie took the floor to discuss some of her views on the situation. She remarked on how her husband handles the Human Resource duties at the school and how the HR director and office, does not actually perform HR duties as the operational structure is based within schools and tax collector's office. She cited this information as she felt the additional personnel requests within the town offices were not warranted, stating that the town as a whole had not grown at a rate that required additional employees to handle HR duties. In explanation, Stephanie took issue with town budgets as she felt there was a grievous disparity in raises between the town and schools, asserting that her husband makes a 2% raise every year versus the 4% raise given to the town hall employees, and stated that the town side was not lean. She reported that during a recent visit to the collector's office to pay a bill, while service was timely, the department did not seem to be overly stressed by workload and thus precluded the need for an office assistant if they are handling their duties without one already. Thom stated that there is lean in the government based off of some the budgets the ADCOM has viewed thus far. Discussion followed on funding methodologies:

10:25 PM Brent made a motioned to adjourn, seconded by Larry.

Vote: 10/0/0

Next meeting to be held and located at the Andrew Gala Jr. Meeting Room on February 7th 2017, at 7:00 PM.

Minutes Taken by Matthew Mackenzie

Minutes approved by Vote of the Advisory Committee.

Date of Meeting:

Vote:

Signature of Chairperson

Signature of Vice Chairperson