

Dover Warrant Committee Joint Meeting with the Sherborn Advisory Committee

February 23, 2009

Dover Warrant Committee members in attendance: Caroline White, Chair; David Stapleton, Vice Chair; Peter Smith, Secretary; James Dawley; Robyn Hunter; Scott Seidman; Andrew Waugh

Sherborn Advisory Committee: Ruth Chamberlin, Chair; Peter Caruso, Vice Chair; Kitty Sturgis, Clerk; Paul Bochicchio; Mark Brandon; Graham Luce; Gwen Ortmeyer; Barbara Wands

Dover-Sherborn Regional Schools: Valerie Spriggs, Superintendent of Schools; Richard Mathieu, Business Manager

Dover-Sherborn Regional School Committee: Clare Graham, Beverly Madden, Rainie Pearson, Richard Robinson, Nathan Van Duzer, Ellen Williamson

The Dover Warrant Committee joined the Sherborn Advisory Committee, already in session, at 7:20 pm

1. Review of the Regional Schools Budget

Mrs. Graham and Madden narrated a slide presentation. They highlighted the accomplishments of the Regional Schools, and the current budget priorities and constraints. The budget assumes that State Chapter 70 aid will be level funded, State transportation aid will be reduced, and fees will not change. They showed the cost-cutting steps that were taken in this the second revision of the budget. They proposed to draw from the Excess and Deficiencies fund to help make up for funding reductions. Per-pupil costs were compared with similar districts. Finally, allocations between the towns were shown.

Discussion began with the arcane way that special education costs are budgeted and Circuit Breaker reimbursement is handled at all levels. Mr. Mathieu suggested that one way to handle indirect reimbursement (as for out-of-district placements) would be to bill the towns and the Region jointly; the Region would pay all bills until funds were exhausted, then turn the remainder over to the towns. However, since the Regional Agreement predates the Circuit Breaker, there is no clear-cut way of transferring town costs to the Region's budget. Mrs. Spriggs agreed to find out how the districts used in the cost comparison (Lincoln-Sudbury and Concord-Carlisle) allocate and budget special education costs and reimbursement.

The size of the Excess and Deficiency fund was questioned. Mrs. Spriggs noted that it was considered prudent during the renovation project to fund it to the state-allowed maximum to take care of unexpected expenses. Past unexpected expenses have included a fire and roof leaks, but there have been none this year.

Class sizes were discussed: the average class size at the High School was reported to be near 17 by Ms. Williamson; Mrs. Spriggs will furnish precise numbers for both schools. Some of the

smaller ones are AP sections, either due to limited participation or scheduling conflicts. It was also noted that small, focused classes can be a very cost-effective alternative to out-of-district special education placement.

Asked if benefit costs are coming down, Mr. Mathieu agreed, stating that some reduction is factored into the current budget, but that actual number will not be available until March. The possibility of transitioning to the State Group Insurance Commission (GIC) plan has been studied, but no action is planned; the current West Suburban plan is comparably priced.

Both the Advisory and Warrant Committees expressed their concerns that the Towns face substantial structural deficits for the coming year. Budgets requiring a Proposition 2½ override were deemed unlikely to pass.

The presentation of the Regional Schools' budget being complete, the Warrant Committee thanked the Advisory Committee and retired at 8:45 pm to allow them to proceed to their review of the Pine Hill School budget. The Warrant Committee reconvened separately at 8:50 pm

2. Other Business

Mrs. Hunter recounted her meeting with the Board of Assessors and her new, detailed understanding of how the tax levy is calculated. Mrs. Hunter and Dr. White will ensure that the Committee is provided with a correct figure for the statutory levy limit.

Mr. Stapleton noted that the Dover School Committee is meeting February 24 to discuss their budget

Mr. Smith will provide members with a summary of the current budget, broken down by responsible authority.

*Mr. Stapleton moved to adjourn, seconded by Dr. White;
the motion was agreed by consensus at 9:10 pm
the next meeting will be February 25 at 7:00 pm*

Respectfully submitted,
Peter Smith, Secretary

approved March 4, 2009