

# Dover Warrant Committee

March 8, 2010

*On March 8, 2010 the Dover-Sherborn Regional School Committee invited the Sherborn Advisory Committee, the Dover Warrant Committee, and other interested parties to attend a presentation on the Fiscal 2011 Budget at the Middle School library.*

Attendees:

Regional School Committee: Ellen Williamson, Chair; Clare Graham; Robyn Hunter; Richard Robinson

Regional Schools Administration: Valerie Spriggs, Superintendent; Steven Bliss, Assistant Superintendent; Christine Tague, Business Manager

Sherborn Advisory Committee: Ruth Chamberlin, Chair; Peter Caruso, Vice Chair; Kitty Sturgis, Clerk; Paul Bochicchio; Gwen Ortmeier; Lanny Rubin; Barbara Wands

Dover Warrant Committee: David Stapleton, Chair; Peter Smith, Secretary; Kate Bush; James Dawley; Kathy Hall; David Melville; Jane Wemyss

Sherborn Board of Selectmen: Ron Fernandes

Dover Board of Selectmen: Carol Lisbon; Joe Melican

*Ms. Williamson called the meeting to order at 7:00 pm*

Ms. Williamson opened the meeting, thanking the Advisory and Warrant Committees for attending. Mss. Graham and Hunter then presented the Regional School Committee's plan for the coming year [the slides are available on the [doversherborn.org](http://doversherborn.org) website]. They enumerated the many accomplishments of the students in academic, athletic, and extra-curricular areas, and drew attention to the high rankings the system has achieved. They also admitted the fiscal challenges that face the schools in this and coming years. The budget assumptions used by the committee factor in the need to continue to provide excellence in education, maintain the physical plant, and retain focus on a long-term strategy; all this in an environment of declining state aid, low revenue growth, and uncertain special education demands.

The budget was broken down into operating costs, debt service, revenue, and the net total assessment. The proposed budget raises the total assessment 4.81% over fiscal 2010, although due to an enrollment increase of 39 pupils (+3.56%) this represents only a 1.21% per pupil increase. 85% of the operating budget consists of contractually fixed salaries and benefits, so the administration has few opportunities for cost paring if programs and staffing levels remain level.

In addition to the assessments from the two towns, the Region receives State aid for education and transportation. It has also acquired significant grants for non-operating programs like teacher development. Finally, community donations are raised through various organizations. Over the last decade, the Region has held cost growth to a modest rate, in the face of significant reduc-

tions in State aid. Specifically, while projected 2011 enrollment will increase 9.26% since 2007, per pupil cost will increase only 4.49%, while state aid decreases 14%.

Because of shifts in enrollment, the changes in assessments to each town differ significantly; Dover's share of this budget would increase \$304,336, up 3.30% from FY10; Sherborn's would increase \$494,281, up 6.69%.

The Regional School Committee planned to certify this budget later the same evening. Once certified, the budget cannot increase, but can decrease based on guidance from the two towns. It was noted that the initial guidance from the two towns was divergent: Dover requested a level-service budget, while Sherborn requested a total assessment increase of no more than 3%. It was noted that adhering to the 3% guidance would require reducing the operating budget by \$650,000 and would entail major reductions in services.

Speaking for the Warrant Committee, Mr. Stapleton stated that guidance to all Dover town departments and the Regional Schools had been for a level-service budget for fiscal 2011. While level-service budgets may not be feasible in the future, based on the information available at this time, the Regional budget appears to fulfill the request, and Warrant is comfortable with the proposal. This of course is contingent on no adverse developments here or elsewhere in the Town budget that would necessitate revisiting this and all other budgets.

Speaking for the Advisory Committee, Ms. Chamberlin stated that her committee's consensus was to develop a non-override budget for fiscal 2011. The original guidance of a 3% assessment increase was based on the numbers available to them in mid-February. She asked the Regional School Committee to consider any and all efficiencies and streamlined delivery that could decrease costs. Efficiencies might be gained through consolidation of special education administration, town and school library synergies, and better class scheduling. She stressed that not only the upcoming year, but the foreseeable future will be difficult. In particular, she reminded all that the Region will have to address a substantial – currently unfunded – OPEB liability someday.

Ms. Williamson noted that Ms. Hunter and Mr. Caruso had been conferring on the details of the budget and would continue to do so. She hoped that any lingering questions could be resolved, and that this communication channel would keep the committees up to date on new developments.

Asked about the wastewater treatment system, Mrs. Spriggs said that engineers are working on a solution, but that no cost estimates are available yet.

Ms. Williamson solicited comments from the floor. Nancy Simms, a Dover parent, spoke of the outstanding education her children have received in the Regional Schools and asked the committees to continue to support excellence.

*Ms. Williamson suspended the meeting at 8:15 pm,  
to resume at 8:30 pm with other business  
The Warrant Committee thanked the Regional School Committee  
for the very informative session and departed*

Respectfully submitted,  
Peter Smith, Secretary

*approved March 17, 2010*