

FINANCE COMMITTEE/SCHOOL COMMITTEE BUDGET PRESENTATION
MARCH 19, 2015
M/HS ENSEMBLE ROOM

OPEN SESSION

CALL TO ORDER

Finance Committee Chair M. Feldman called the meeting to order at 7:46 p.m. Finance Committee members present: J. Clements-Skelton, K. Murphy, M. Schaaf, R. Howard, R. White, I. Miles, M. Swan
School Committee members present: S. Gresh, S. Player, J. Bauman, F. Krason, H. O'Flynn, B. Hopping, and M. DiBello.
Also present were Superintendent W. Hart, Finance Director J. Cuff, Director of Pupil Personnel Services B. Hegedus, and Principals D. Fabrizio, S. McAdams, S. Conley.

CITIZENS' QUERIES

L. Seidler, Chair of Long-Range Planning Committee, with an updated chart which compares tax rates on the North Shore, reported that Ipswich ranks sixth from the bottom of 18 communities. With an override of \$3 million, Ipswich might move up from 6th to 7th spot. In addition, questioning the value of an override from the standpoint of lower income people and upper income people, value is a lot more important than the cost. It is not just cost that is the issue; education is the issue.

S. Jewell, Technology Education Teachereacher, spoke of continued erosion of supplies as a line item in the budget. A personal classroom cut of 15% two years ago to his technology budget has been hit with another 33% cut, and he is currently struggling to find supplies; e.g. cardboard at the dump and a plywood gift to cut up for his technology classes. The administrators say they have never seen line items like instructional materials, equipment, repair and maintenance; they were zeroed out in 2005-2006. His drill press needs replacement because there are no replacement parts available due to its age. He tried the Newman Fund and a Feoffee grant to no avail and was told it should be in the operating budget when he tried other means.

Dana Allen, Birth to 3 Director, mentioned three things that can affect a special need: family engagement and support, high quality early childhood education, and early intervention, again asking for support.

Mitch Feldman thanked ICAM for flexibility and broadcasting in the Ensemble Room.

BUDGET PRESENTATIONS

Dr. Hart introduced Dr. Beverly Hegedus, Director of Pupil Personnel Services, who will present first, then the District-wide budget, and then the override proposal.

SPECIAL EDUCATION BUDGET

Dr. Hegedus reviewed the special education department with PowerPoint slides depicting expense growth, measures of effectiveness, eligibility of the 13.4%

(state average: 17%) in Ipswich (of 1947 total student population), disability incidence, services performed commensurate with need, and special education budget drivers. She reviewed fiscal oversight, building district capacity and her meetings with special education personnel and others. Finance Committee members asked questions of out placements (24) and those who would qualify for Circuit Breaker (11) but transportation and other additives do not qualify.

ALL-DISTRICT BUDGET

Dr. Hart reviewed the projected FY16 budget and the staff cuts (in 2015, roughly a 10% cut of the 262 employees). Mr. Feldman asked to see the \$555,000 shortage details. In the 1990s and 2000s, there were innumerable awards and visits from other schools and states to Ipswich whereas now per pupil spending has meant that Ipswich sits near the bottom of per pupil expenditures and has no outstanding 21st Century advantages. Charts show SAT scores (2013-14) and MCAS low growth (2013-14).

Ingrid Miles answered the question of schools impacting real estate prices. People with children looking for property will look at MCAS scores, ask real estate agents, and make conclusions, a major point when one buys property.

Dr. Hart showed a short video on “deeper learning” and spoke of the importance of the STEAM program to enhancement to education as a great medium for building analysis, synthesis, and evaluation.

OVERRIDE BUDGET

Dr. Hart showed two slides of budget statistics comparing the Target budget and an Override budget. For the most part, an override would restore the target budget staff cuts and add more in all four schools and the Central Office: a Director of Teaching and Learning, .15 technology director, .50 behavior specialist, 2.0 ELL teachers, \$50,000 Birth to Three program support, and \$97,500 for curriculum and professional development.

The override request of \$2.9 million would cover a four-year period. He asked in a final slide for \$500K more for media specialists for the elementaries as well as STEAM supplies/materials, technology education, and science teachers at the Middle School, engineering teacher and ELA common-core writing teacher at the High School, and district-wide professional development funding.

Mrs. Clements-Skelton asked for the reason to add a fulltime director of teaching and learning. Mr. Murphy, Audit Committee member, reported that one of its major directives was to add a curriculum director. Mr. Fabrizio said the override would reduce class sizes and pretty much restore the Middle School model.

To other questions, Dr. Hart responded that the high school schedule is in negotiations for holding classes during the entire year, extending team teaching for staff, and collaboration of time and extended periods of 70 minutes. In developing the staffing in the event of the override, Dr. Hart is making sure that class size, supportive services, guidance and academic support are available, a vision of the 21st Century school system with commitment to K-12 in a STEAM approach.

Mr. Hopping presented the impact on the tax bills to homeowners: a single-family home median value of \$457,355 without override goes up \$555.50, and with an override it goes up an extra \$534.95, total increase of \$690.45. The School Committee will vote a final override number on April 2.

Mr. Feldman asked for the results of the audit.

Dr. O'Flynn commented, "\$1.1 million of the override number would go into the bank; \$1.7 million would be added to the expected school budget next year. The \$2.9 million override gets rid of the deficits in personnel, allows a STEAM school, would bring libraries and more tech ed into the secondary schools. To do a STEAM school would be shoring the system up. Without this, that great school system is pushed off to another day."

Mr. Hopping and the Finance Committee set March 26 as the next Tri Board meeting to get the Board of Selectmen on board. Many more players and a series of strategies including getting businesses involved are being worked out.

Sue Brengle, override committee organizer, asked what role the Finance Committee plans to play. Mr. Feldman answered that, as an advisory committee to Town meeting, the Finance Committee needs to take everyone in the community into consideration. The welfare of the schools is important to the long-term vibrancy of the Town, and it is important that the schools thrive and do well. As part of that, we ask tough questions and do the diligence. It is not warm and fuzzy but, by doing our homework and understanding the drivers, it makes us able to be supportive. Dr. O'Flynn asked the Finance Committee, "What happens if we fail? Our schools are obviously in crisis. I also think that the common message should be that examining the whole town's budget is necessary."

Mr. Hopping gave a personal, reflective prospective, recognizing the people who have come for three nights, those who have presented, the teachers, parents and students who helped deliver the message. He thanked his colleagues on the School Committee, the Superintendent, Ms. Cuff, and Dr. Hegedus. Finally, he thanked the Finance Committee members for being a receptive audience, asking probing questions, and helping to inform the public at large. Serving 16 years on the School Committee, he feels that his motivation remains the same: have a positive and lasting impact on the lives of children. We are now jeopardizing meaningful connections. Will we have given them our best chance for success? Connections often make the difference to a child. The basic premise is that learning feels welcome, safe, and special with classroom environments conducive to learning. His goal of giving back to this community should serve as an invitation to the public to join in. He asks for support of the override, which will be difficult for some, but failure will be an even greater burden. "You need to vote 'Yes' on Article 10 at Town Meeting and at the ballot box on May 19," he urged.

ADJOURNMENT

Meeting adjourned at 11:07 p.m.