

Warrant Committee Education Subcommittee
April 6, 2023 7:00 PM
Town Hall, Conference Room #4 and Remote via Zoom

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TOWN CLERK
BELMONT, MA

DATE: July 20, 2023
TIME: 9:19 AM

Meeting Minutes

Members in Attendance

Bill Anderson, Anne Helgen, Laurie Slap, Matt Taylor, Jack Weis

Call to Order

The meeting was called to order at 7:07 PM.

Discussion of FY 24 Warrant Committee Budget Report

The subcommittee had a detailed discussion regarding the report structure and content. Specifically, we agreed that we would start each section by listing, in bullet-point fashion, the key conclusions that we want the reader to come away with after reading our respective sections. We then agreed on an ordering of the sections of the report and discussed the key points we wanted to make sure were covered in each section. The order of the sections and the key conclusions and major points were as follows:

- A. Budget Overview (Bill's section)
 - General overview of the General Fund numbers and the total budget including other funding sources.
 - Key conclusions tie to the other sections that we have identified for further discussion.
- B. Enrollment (Matt)
 - General overall enrollment trends over the past few years
 - Enrollment shifts by age cohort (increase at high school; drop in K-2, etc.)
 - Question as to whether recent lower enrollments will bounce back.
 - Changes in student profile (i.e., increase in SPED and ELL; volatility within the school year, not just year-to-year)
- C. Staffing – Historic Trends (Matt)
 - Historic trends in total FTE.
 - Shift in allocation among categories. (Need to address shift in kindergarten program from part-time to full-time to extent we talk about General Fund FTEs rather than total FTEs.)
 - Historic pattern of unplanned/unbudgeted additions during school year.
- D. Staffing – FY 24 Redeployment, Reconfiguration, Reductions (Paul)
 - Redeployment – explain moving staff from where students no longer are to where they now are.
 - Reconfiguration – Acknowledge legitimate additions associated with new school, but also point out that there seem to be additional increases not specifically related to a new school (such as due to scheduling and/or meeting other general needs, e.g., HS enrollment).
- E. Staffing – Federal COVID-Relief Funds (Laurie)
 - Describe FY 24 reductions.
 - Difference between budget and actuals in FY23 and before (unfilled positions; number of FY 24 reductions that are true layoffs versus eliminating unfilled positions).

- Concern that when ARPA funds no longer available, School Department may conclude and advocate that the federally-funded positions are not temporary needs, but are essential permanent needs that need to be funded out of the General Fund (FY26 issue).
- F. Contracts (Jack)
- Explain impact of step and lane system, and explain comp increases not just from COLA.
 - Explain how percentage increase when factoring in step and lane is not sustainable within Prop 2½ constraints. Cite School Department estimate of 5.05% projected compensation growth rate.
 - Confirm comp increase in FY24 is approx. 6% and, if so, explain why higher than the aforementioned 5.05%. (Larger percentage in Unit D scale? Larger percentage in Unit B?)
 - Acknowledge similar step and lane system in other MA towns and need for Belmont to have to compete for teachers.
- G. SPED (Anne)
- Brief distinction between in-district and out-of-district ELL and SPED costs. In-district cost increases modest.
 - Unprecedented rise in OOD costs due to increase in students, increase in tuition rates, restoration of General Fund contribution to total costs (vs. artificially low contribution in FY23), and recapitalizing a reserve balance depleted in FY23.
 - Goal of trying to provide more in-district support in the future to reduce OOD costs (and to benefit students by letting them remain in town).

The group then reviewed the next steps and the timing associated with each. Specifically:

- April 9th – Subcommittee members will each send our individual comments on the various Draft 1A sections to the respective authors of those sections by the end of the day.
- April 12th – Each subcommittee member will revise/update their individual sections by the end of the day.
- April 14th – Jack will compile the individual sections into a single document and send to Geoff by the end of the day.
- April 19th – We'll meet again to discuss next steps – both regarding our report and to address additional questions we might want to raise in a follow-up meeting with the School Department administration and School Committee.

Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 9:34 PM.