**FINANCE COMMITTEE**

**Meeting Minutes**

**Tuesday, March 10, 2015, 6:30 PM**

**Lower Conference Room**

**Members Present:** John Heffernan (Chair), William Podolski, Russell Stamm, Maureen Hanlon, Dave Roberts, Liz O’Donnell, Steve Bilafer, Sue Carney and Kevin Hughes.

Mr. Heffernan called meeting to order at 6:30 PM.

6:30 PM: School Department Budget Hearings-

Superintendent Mike Welch was present. He explained that he can’t wait to get to work every day. He thinks Dedham is a great community and he appreciates everyone’s patience as he continues to learn the process. Mr. Welch thanked everyone from the School Budget Sub- Committee. He also thanked Sam Rippen for his help.

Mr. Welch described the process the School Department went through in developing this budget as well as the timeline of events to get to this point. Mr. Welch described how he intends to increase student achievement by investing the biggest focus on kindergarteners. He would like to put forward full day kindergarten for free, and explained that over 250 towns in Massachusetts do this, and many even do full day preschool for free. He would like to do this by rolling it into the operational budget over the course of the next four years. He believes they will see the largest quality and bang for their buck going after the youngest children first. Only 69% are getting a full day of kindergarten now, and by fall 2018 it will be available to everyone. This year they plan to knock the fee down by $1,000. The goal is to make sure Dedham students are not disadvantaged. $25,000 each year will be rolled into the operational budget.

Mr. Welch also spoke about the need for better quality professional development and training for staff district wide. Mr. Welch would like to extend the academic calendar from 182 to 183 for teachers. The goal will be to frontload professional development to the early part of the year. This is requested at $125,000 for FY16.

Mr. Welch also talked about the need for upgraded rigorous curriculum for students, and commented on the excellent technology that the schools have in place noting that Needham came to Dedham to learn about their technology approach. Mr. Welch explained that they are working on an electronic set of resources that teacher can use that will have best practice materials and curricula all in one place.

Mr. Welch discussed the need for quality teacher coverage. He explained that there has been increased leave of absences with a number of teachers being at the child bearing age and 75% of needed coverage cannot be accommodated. He would like to request 14 substitute teachers at 3 days per week to remedy this problem.

Mr. Welch discussed the HR Manager role that is requested for $70,000. The Schools have on boarded 156 employees over past year and needed the help so they found the money within their budget to hire someone on FY15 and the request is to have a line item to cover this position going forward. Mr. Welch explained that they are also requesting funding for an ELL Teacher at $50,000, and a few other positions which he detailed. This results in a 3.02% increase in FY16 for what he considered a level service budget.

Mr. Heffernan asked Mr. Welch how this budget was level service. Mr. Welch explained that he believes that the requests are needed in order to maintain the level of service.

Mr. Welch explained how a 4.49% request was approved by School Committee on Feb 11th and Mr. Kern has recommended 3.97%. They have taken the percentage recommended by Mr. Kern and put the items into priority order at the same 3.97%.

Ms. Carney commented that she is surprised there are not more requests for supplies and text books.

Mr. Heffernan confirmed with Mr. Welch that if they were not meeting the NEASC standards they would be seeing books to get up to the necessary number of volumes.

Mr. Heffernan asked Mr. Welch to explain the Chrome Book capital request to the Finance Committee as it is directly related to the requested IT position. Mr. Welch described the initiative to implement chrome books into the Middle school with the assistance of Don Langenhorst, in the same way that it was described to the Capital Expenditures Committee.

Mr. Podolski asked what contributed to the high turnover in personnel requiring an HR Manager. Mr. Welch responded there were a good number of maternity leaves, retirements, people resigning, medical leave, and para-professionals moving into teaching positions. Mr. Podolski asked if the amount of new employees on boarded in the past 12 months was normal. Mr. Welch responded that it was higher than expected.

Mr. Podolski also commented that he was shocked to see how few people were at Dedham High School. Mr. Welch explained that they have conducted a survey to address the concern of why families were not sending students to Dedham Public Schools. There were 180 families who over past 6 years were within Dedham schools and chose to leave. From those 180 families, they received 70 responses. They are analyzing the results now and plan to make that information public. Mr. Podolski commented that Mr. Welch is “a breath of fresh air.”

Mr. Stamm thanked Mr. Welch for describing the specific items they want to fund within a prioritized “wish list” as he better understands what is out there and where the money can be spent. He would like to see metrics where possible to better understand the return on investment. Mr. Stamm asked if they have been seeing energy savings as a result of the Siemens project. Mr. Rippen responded that they won’t know if the Town is realizing savings for that until the Town has paid off the cost of putting it in.

Ms. Hanlon confirmed with Mr. Langenhorst that the expectation is that the buy in for Chrome Books will be quick and seamless. Teachers will have the opportunity to become familiar with the Chromebooks following a full day conference and will be taking them home for the summer.

Mr. Welch explained that the HR Manager will be doing a lot of recruiting. He explained that the Schools have not done a good job with recruiting.

Mr. Welch explained that they need to make an investment in the people they are bringing in. It is difficult to adhere to changing mandates without someone dedicated to HR. They need help making sure they meet the requirements of the FMLA, training needs, and full fingerprinting, etc.

Ms. Hanlon commented that her concern is that the HR Director position that Miriam Johnson now holds was sold as a position for both the Town and School. She was surprised that it was done within this year’s budget instead of next year’s budget. Mr. Welch explained that Miriam Johnson was on the hiring committee. The job was posted using the Talent Ed HR system that the School has. They interviewed 8 people for the position. Ms. Hanlon explained that the objection that she has is the way it was handled.

Mr. Roberts commented on using the facilities department as a model. He thinks that facilities was handled correctly covering both municipal and schools and he trusts that there will also be a blending and close working relationship between municipal HR and school HR. Mr. Welch responded that he is looking forward to working very closely with the Town.

Ms. Hanlon commented that she is putting her complete faith in the superintendent and the Town Manager working together to make the Town and schools more cohesive.

Ms. O’Donnell asked who was responsible for the hiring of the 156 employees. Mr. Welch explained the number of people with hands on the process. Without an HR Manager there is an absence of fairness and consistency. The HR Manager that was hired was an assistant in another community for several years.

Mr. Hughes commented that the existing HR Director was hired to oversee 700 people including both the Schools and the Town. The Town HR department requested an assistant this year which was not recommended by the Town Manager. Mr. Hughes commented that there should be more coordination between the Town and the School. Mr. Welch agreed that he needs to sit down with the Town Manager.

Ms. Carney commented that the only issue she has with the HR Manager position is that she finds it odd that it is requested in FY 16 budget, when they found the funds to hire someone in FY 15. She commented that the School Department could be more cost effective. Why are they asking for it to be funded if they have already done it? Ms. Carney added that she does not see it as a level service; she sees it as increasing the kind of attention needed. Ms. Carney added that she also believes that the full-time special educator at the Dedham Middle School should be able to be accommodated within the departments existing budget. Ms. Carney commented that she feels very comfortable that the Dedham Public Schools are in good hands with Mr. Welch. Ms. Carney also asked about contracted services and stated that the Schools should look to hire a pathologist if it is more cost effective than the contracting, and if there is a continued need. Mr. Welch commented that it may be unlikely to find a person who can offer PT, OT, and speech. Ms. Carney also commented on the request for substitutes, and noted that while she appreciated the benefit that could be derived by having teachers observe, she thought 14 was high. Ms. Carney noted that she is pro-education, particularly public education, and thinks the Schools are right on the money with where the improvements are needed. Mr. Welch commented that he enjoys conversations with Ms. Carney.

Mr. Bilafer commented that the School Department presented a good budget that acts as a priority statement. He appreciates the story telling approach and providing a roadmap. He also appreciates getting the vision behind the numbers and finds it to be very helpful. He added that with relatively low chapter 70 Dedham taxpayers carry the brunt of the cost. The Town is treated like a wealthier district than they are and he believes that if the formula is redone the Town may get their fair share meaning that they won’t have to almost totally rely on the taxpayers.

Russell Poole commented on the HR Manager role, and echoed Ms. Carney and Ms. Hanlon’s comments on the matter. He also mentioned the request for free full time kindergarten. He noted with the ECEC in the pipeline and its expected operational cost, if they remove the idea of free they can use the money to pay for the operational cost. He also mentioned that if you were to remove the educational component from kindergarten you are left with daycare. $3500 is considerably less than the cost of daycare.

Mr. Heffernan thanked the School Department. .

Mr. Heffernan reminded the Committee that the budget hearings from the Saturday meeting will be continued to next week’s meeting.

9:15 PM: Mr. Podolski made a motion to adjourn, seconded by Ms. Carney. UA