

**Advisory Committee
Meeting Minutes
February 7, 2023
Hingham Town Hall, South Hearing Room**

In Attendance: Chair George Danis, Nancy MacDonald, Davalene Cooper, Andrew McElaney, Caitlyn Kirk, Brenda Black, Alan Macdonald, Carol Tully, Brian Stack, Sarah Melia, Kathy Curley, Joe Griffin

Absent:

Participating Remotely: Tina Sherwood, Jason Price, Lyndsey Kruzer

Call Meeting to Order: Chair Danis called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m. and read the following statement:

“This meeting is being held remotely as an alternate means of public access pursuant to an Order issued by the Governor of Massachusetts dated March 12, 2020 Suspending Certain Provisions of the Open Meeting Law. You are hereby advised that this meeting and all communications during this meeting may be recorded by the Town of Hingham in accordance with the Open Meeting Law. If any participant wishes to record this meeting, please notify the Chair at the start of the meeting in accordance with M.G.L. c. 30A, § 20(f) so that the chair may inform all other participants of said recording.”

School Committee Member Michelle Ayer called the School Committee to order, adopting the same statement that Chair Danis used above.

Comments from the public on Items not on the Agenda

There were no comments.

Hearing and discussion on the proposed FY 24 School budget

Ms. MacDonald, Chair of ACES, introduced the school budget hearing. There will be two budgets presented. Level services, as is done every year, and this year, given the proposed override, there will be a balanced budget which by law, must match the Town’s revenue projections for FY24.

The Hingham Public Schools FY24 Budget Presentation was made by Dr. Margaret Adams, Superintendent of Schools and Aisha Oppong, Director of Finance and Operations.

The school budget process began in September 2022. A staffing audit was completed by Dr. Adams in the fall.

Administration Priorities: Sustain current comprehensive programming and continue to develop the multi-tiered system of social emotional and academic supports, professional development, and maintain and update facilities and technologies.

Dr. Adams gave an overview of the Hingham Public Schools Strategic Plan.

Budget Drivers: (1) increased out-of-district special education tuitions were projected to increase by 14%, due to inflation. (For context, this number has ranged from 0.75 % to as high as 2.72%.); (2) increased contractual obligations; and (3) increased fuel costs which may double... The district has a goal to reduce

or eliminate full-day kindergarten tuition. School Administration would like to remove technology from capital outlay and update curriculum materials. It was noted that there has been a pause in the MSBA accelerated repairs program, which will impact the school's ability to update buildings including the high school, South School and Plymouth River. Also, increased transportation costs and unfunded state mandates are impacting the budgets.

This budget includes increased fees for activities and a strong commitment to community use of schools outside of the school day, with increased fees for usage. It was also noted that professional development has not been sufficiently budgeted.

Three budgets were presented:

- Level Services Budget
- Balanced Budget or Reduced Services Budget
- Additional Requests to Support the District's Strategic Plan

The Commonwealth has a circuit breaker program to mitigate increased out-of-district tuition costs, but it is not available this year. This means that the 14% potential increase in out-of-district tuition costs will need to be absorbed by the Town this year. The School Administration is hopeful that circuit breaker funds will be available next year to help mitigate those higher increases.

Some of the entities who use the school facilities include sports groups (for basketball, soccer, and tennis), boosters, PTO, community organizations, and a church. Dance troupes also use the schools for performances.

An overview of the Multi-Tiered Systems of Support for students was presented and data was shared from tests of Early Literacy Skills from 2019 to 2022.

How do Hingham students' outcomes compare to students in benchmark communities? The one assessment that every school district takes is the MCAS so we have comparable data to benchmark communities there. The other parts of the MTSS are not state-mandated, so every community may approach this differently which makes direct comparisons to other benchmark communities challenging.

The School Administration noted that MCAS comparison data is publicly available, and can also be sent to AdCom members who request it. For Dibels for early literacy, there are multiple products available, so direct comparisons of the data is not available. Similarly, the data screeners for grades 3, 5 ELA and K-5 Math are not mandated screeners, so not every district would have comparable data.

Financial resources are needed for curriculum for assessments and for reading program. Further, additional investment in teachers and staff so they will be on the cutting edge of best practices will help the schools to show even better outcomes. Significantly, the schools have seen marked improvements in students' academic work from the beginning of the year to the middle of the year. It was only because of the schools' additional staff that they were able to measure these results.

Have the schools seen similar improvements with the special ed population as with the regular ed population? The data is not disaggregated to represent that population of students. The data is not segregated based on ability. Meetings with elementary school principals and reviewing available data, however, allows one to see improved outcomes. Students are improving from the beginning of the year to the middle of the year, including students with disabilities.

What is the budget impact of professional development? Development falls into a few buckets including a contractual obligation to fund graduate courses. But some of the most powerful professional development takes place on early release days when the time is used to target strategic initiatives. This year, for example, the schools targeted universally designed math instruction for elementary school educators and social emotional development. Outside presenters are used for certain programs but these come with a significant price tag. For example, last summer, the schools brought in experts from Orton-Gillingham, Restorative Justice and Special Education Training that was very valuable. The operational budget only reflects a fraction of the actual expenditures for professional development because the schools aggressively search for grant funding. In the current school year, the schools received, year to date, almost \$50,000 of grants for professional development. Additionally, the Hingham Educational Foundation provided almost \$200,000 for a computer science initiative. The school department has strong staff in-house for some professional development but needs the infusion of expertise from academic partners to meet its strategic plan objectives. The mentoring program is a state-mandated best-practices program. It is a 3-year program that provides a new educator with mentoring by an experienced teacher and includes stipends. The school department budget does not currently meet its stated objectives.

There is significant monitoring and testing being performed in the elementary schools. The program is working its way up through the grade levels to the middle school and high school but needed to start at the schools where it was most needed.

The school administration noted that testing is done in the month of January. Directors meet with teams across town. Meetings at the middle school are ongoing. On February 27th the administration will present data from the middle school. The school administration has full sets of data for grade 6, but do dip sticks / test checks for the neediest students.

Hearing, discussion and vote on School Department reserve fund transfer request

Approve reserve fund transfer request for \$44,000

This request is to ensure ADA accessibility to the playgrounds at South Elementary School for a disabled student. This will enable accessibility to most of the swings and ensure that the student can access the lower playground. The total project budget is \$67,400. After the transfer from the Reserve Fund, the balance will be covered by the School's Building Revolving Account.

A motion was made and seconded and the reserve fund transfer was approved by a roll call vote of 14-0.

Warrant Articles: Hearing, discussion and possible vote on the following Articles:

R: Amend General By-Laws Article 18—Fees for Plumbing and Gas Permits (J. Griffin)

These Articles will increase inspection fees. The fees are deposited in a revolving fund that is used to pay portions of the salaries for the inspectors who do these inspections, as well as their equipment. The Articles will also authorize the Select Board to make changes to these fees in the future, thus eliminating the necessity of a Warrant Article for fee increases to go through the Warrant Article process.

Article I provided an accounting control by limiting the amount of money that can be drawn from these revolving funds.

The fees have not been adjusted since 2010. Technology has accelerated greatly since that time and the skills required to perform the inspections have increased as well. The fees will increase, on average, approximately 42%. The Building Department evaluated data from more than 1,900 inspections and also evaluated fees from 10 surrounding towns and the new fees are in the middle of fees charged by surrounding towns.

This Article will be voted at a future meeting.

Z: Electrical Permit Fees (J. Griffin)

This is similar Article to R and will increase the electrical permit fees to bring the Town's fees in line with current rates. This Article will be voted at a future meeting.

V: Permitting and Design of Inner Harbor Coastal Structures

This Article was brought forward by the Harbor Development Committee. The Committee needs these funds to complete the permitting process.

This Article will be voted at a future meeting.

Liaison Reports:

ACES (N. MacDonald)

Monday, Feb 13, the School Committee will hold a public hearing for the school budget.

Forecast update: Sue Nickerson, Town Accountant

This discussion will be deferred to a future meeting.

Discussion of Advisory Committee housekeeping items:

Approval of Minutes from the January 10, 24 and 31 2023 AdCom meetings

- The Advisory Committee Meeting Minutes from the January 10, 2023 were unanimously approved (13-0-1)
- The Advisory Committee Meeting Minutes from the January 24, 2023 were unanimously approved (14-0)
- The Advisory Committee Meeting Minutes from the January 31, 2023 were unanimously approved (13-0-1)

Upcoming meetings:

- February 16, 2023: Joint meeting with the SB, SC, SA on the FY 24 School budget. Possible meeting during the week of February 20-24 (school break)

- Review of annual AdCom meeting calendar
- School facilities tour: February 11, 2023

Chair Danis is putting together a meeting schedule for budget discussions.

The meeting was adjourned at 10:53 pm. by roll-call vote (14-0).

Documents Distributed for this Meeting:

AdCom February 7, 2023 Meeting Agenda

Reserve Fund Transfer for South School Playground

Five-Year Preliminary Forecast

Preliminary FY24 Budget & Override Discussion

**Respectfully Submitted,
Tina Sherwood
Secretary, Advisory Committee**