

Watertown School Committee

Report of the Subcommittee on Budget and Finance

Meeting Date: November 27, 2017

Location: Phillips School Innovation Lab, 3rd Floor

Subcommittee Members in Attendance: John Portz (chair) and Kendra Foley

School Officials in Attendance: Dede Galdston, Mary DeLai

Other Attendees: School Committee members Eileen Hsu-Balzer, Mark Sideris and Member-elect Amy Donohue; Town Councillor Vinnie Piccirilli; Town Auditor Tom Tracy, and members of the public.

The meeting was called to order at 6:00.

I. Proposed Budget Goals for FY19 Budget

A draft of budget goals was presented, along with a background memo from the Superintendent. The discussion focused on the draft budget goals. These were presented in the context of the district's four strategic objectives adopted in September. The budget goals included: 1) Support educators' instructional practice to meet the needs of all students; 2) Create systems of support to achieve the District's strategic objectives; and 3) Ensure that existing programs and initiatives continue to the point of being sustainable well into the future. Under each goal there are a number of priorities that identify more specific activities in support of that goal. There was general discussion on a number of the priorities. The subcommittee approved two amendments to the draft goals: 1) include support for the Building for the Future initiative, particularly around supporting the work on the elementary schools; and 2) include the arts as one of the areas for "continued implementation."

By a 2-0 vote, the subcommittee recommended adoption of the amended FY19 budget goals.

II. Information about Minuteman and Timeline for Considering Participation Options

The Superintendent reported on a meeting that she and Assist. Supt. Mary DeLai had with representatives from Minuteman. The purpose of the meeting was to gather information on issues related to the possibility of Watertown becoming a member district. Discussion covered a variety of pros and cons to joining Minuteman, with a focus on costs and future access to student slots. The memo from the Superintendent included a 5-year cost comparison, prepared by Minuteman, showing projected costs for 70 students (with ½ special needs) if Watertown is a member district and if Watertown continues to send students on an 'out of district' status. After four years, from FY22 to FY25, annual costs under membership are higher than as a non-member. However, it was noted that that relationship might change because debt service under membership would be level after the fourth year. It was noted that a fuller comparison would consider 20 years (the time of debt service) and a dollar loss estimate for the decline in Chapter 70 aid to Watertown if vocational students are no longer included.

The timeline to join would likely take over a year. All nine member-communities must vote (town meetings) and the state DESE must approve. This must be done prior to Dec. 31 of any year, then membership begins the following July. If Watertown were to join, it would likely begin an application in late 2018, then in 2019 the member towns would vote and DESE would approve, prior to Dec. 31, then membership could begin in July 2020. However, considerably more discussion and review are needed. The subcommittee asked for additional information (the financial data mentioned above); the Supt. plans to interview/survey current students to better understand their reason for attending Minuteman; it was recommended to invite a representative from Minuteman to present and ask questions; and it would be helpful to know why Belmont and a number of other communities have ended their membership in Minuteman. The subcommittee will hear back in January or February.

III. Building for the Future

For the elementary school project, the Superintendent noted that Ai3 has been selected to be the architect, pending approval by the Town Council. The high school project is still under consideration at the MSBA.

The meeting adjourned at 7:30.

IV. Documents Presented

- FY19 Draft Budget Goals
- Memo from the Superintendent, dated November 24, 2017, on “FY 19 Budget Goals and Overarching Priorities”
- Fiscal Year 2019 Budget Calendar
- Memo from the Superintendent, dated November 24, 2017, on “Update on Minuteman Regional Vocational Technical High School”

Submitted by John Portz, Chair