

Finance Committee Meeting Minutes January 16, 2007

Those Present: Al DeVito - chair, Sharon Estrella, Skip Manter, Richard Knabel and Brian Athearn

Guests: Bruce Stone, town accountant; Glenn Hearn, selectman; School Superintendent Dr. James Weiss; High School Principal Peg Regan; West Tisbury School Asst. Principal Bob Lane; Dan Secklecki, SPED director, UIRSD School committee members - Dan Cabot, Roxanne Ackerman, Susan Parker and Joan Ames.

This meeting was taped for airing on MVTV by Jim Osmundsen.

The meeting was called to order at 4:37 p.m.

Minutes:

The minutes of the December 12 and January 9 meetings were approved with slight changes.

During tonight's meeting the proposed FY '08 budgets of the Schools Superintendent, the High School and the UIRSD will be reviewed with the FinCom.

Al DeVito asked the members to review the two proposals relative to changing the allocation of capital costs in the regional school agreement presented to the FinCom by Dr. Weiss via the mail and distributed at the last meeting. It was moved and seconded that the FinCom preferred an allocation whereby a town's population in a particular school was considered as part of the allocation of capital costs. The vote was 3 approved and 2 opposed.

Superintendent's Office Budget:

In his presentation **Dr. James Weiss** explained that the bulk of his increases was reflected in salaries including an increase for bargaining. The other two line items that added significantly to his initial proposed budget were for new programs. The first was an 8th grade algebra program for the most advanced students. This program would provide students six years of math by the time they graduate from high school. It would service 25-30 students island-wide who would either meet together at the high school or at the elementary schools. The total cost would be \$19,400: \$12,400 for staff, \$2,000 for materials and the remainder for transportation.

The second new program would be for an island-wide facilities manager to look at all facilities and coordinate efforts for managing large projects such as upgrades to major systems. This proposal was dropped in discussions with the School Committee.

Dr. Weiss also cited the increase in the Steamship Authority's rates by \$38,000 island-wide. He noted that the actual cost for the Superintendent's budget for UIRSD had decreased by \$6800 or 1.12% due to a decrease in the UIRSD student population. This was in contrast to an island-wide increase of 5%. The MVRHS pays 20% of the Superintendent's budget; the towns make up the other 80% based on enrollment.

Richard asked if Dr. Weiss thought his budget was an adequate response to a request for a -0- budget increase. Dr. Weiss replied that he thought that it was due to the services and people the Supt.'s office provides to all the schools. Laying people off would reduce services.

Skip asked why the ELL salary was increased from \$41k to \$65K. Dr. Weiss said the job hours had to be increased from ½ time to ¾ time to do the work required by the state/federal governments.

When questioned about the increase by \$200k since he got here, Dr. Weiss again cited the increase in salaries.

Al noted that the percentage of students in SPED programs seems to be higher than the rest of the state. Dr. Weiss said the state has a rate of 14-15% while the Vineyard is 18-20%. Dan Secklecki, SPED director, said the largest reason for this is the fact that off-island schools have access to a lot of support services that we don't have and that we get very little federal funding. The SPED program here is the safety net for our students and our parents are not afraid to seek assistance for their children. Dr. Weiss noted that the Title 1 program only serves the Tisbury and Oak Bluffs schools. When asked if a student who begins in SPED is likely to leave that program Dan said it was not likely. SPED provides a level playing field. The program produces MCAS referrals for those students who don't pass or are anticipated not to pass. Testing is now 2nd through 12th grades with a requirement to pass the 10th grade test in order to graduate.

Discussion ended. No vote was taken since the Superintendent's budget is part of the MVRHS and UIRSD budgets.

MVRHS Budget:

Principal Peg Regan began her presentation explaining that she had worked a 5-year maintenance plan into her budget. She received professional help to put maintenance and vehicle expenses into the operating budget rather than wait for an expense to arise and transfer money to cover it. This is now backed up by a very clear plan that includes an annual rotation of projects with their expected costs. Mrs. Regan noted that the line-by-line budget had a total increase, but that it included money for negotiations and the maintenance plan.

Mrs. Regan then discussed transportation. Costs will be less because less was spent. Costs were down from 4.72% to 3.25% island-wide on E&D. Next year there will be a very low increase, the following year will be more. The stabilization fund will level out the costs and then the budget won't fluctuate as much. Skip noted that he did not like the use of high school buses for transporting Oak Bluffs and Tisbury elementary students.

Richard asked if there was any indication of changes coming from state reimbursements now that there is a new administration in Boston. Mrs. Regan said it was not a reliable expectation. There was some discussion about HS enrollment and class size. Remedial classes are lowest in size while honors are as high as possible. Aides are present in SPED classes only.

CORI is a new line item due to an all-island policy to do more extensive criminal background checks. Mrs. Regan closed by saying that she felt it was very helpful when members of the various FinComs participated in budget discussions with the High School. It gives both bodies an insight that is quite useful.

UIRSD Budget:

Dr. Weiss presented the UIRSD budget. At the December meeting the UIRSD committee voted a 3.82% increase over FY07 for operating costs primarily attributed to salary. Staffing at the West Tisbury School allows for 16-19 pupils per class with one teacher and one paraprofessional. The committee will meet with the school during the summer to discuss revamping this policy. West Tisbury has a 4% budget increase, Chilmark has a 9% budget increase due to specific SPED needs. There has been a decrease in reimbursements and

revenue resulting in a bottom line increase of 3.9%. Dr. Weiss noted other factors to consider. Namely, that he has reduced special subjects such as music, art, phys. ed. and Spanish and has further reduced staff by not rehiring to fill vacated positions.

Brian asked why there are so many aides at this time. Dr. Weiss said this is an island-wide phenomena influenced by things such as MCAS and SPED programs. The demands on both students and teachers have changed significantly over the years. The WT School provides a different product that is project-driven and has a very hands-on approach. Brian asked why there was a need for SPED if there is so much one-on-one in the classroom. Dan Secklecki explained that SPED kids are included in the classroom and are not segregated. They have individualized lessons and a resource room they can go to for assistance. Educators are held responsible and the time on task requirements has heated up. Teachers must justify time not on task.

Richard said the biggest problem they are having is with the yearly budget increase over the past 5 or 6 years when each year enrollment has gone down. This year enrollment is down 8%. How is this budget responsive to a decreased enrollment and what will be done to establish a connect between the cost/student? Dr. Weiss responded that the past few years staffing had declined, both regular and special. The School Committee had a significant discussion about adjusting this model and will have a discussion this summer with the school.

Al expressed his concern that the UIRSD budget process is fundamentally flawed. Information to establish the actual cost per pupil is not available. Dan Cabot, member of the UIRSD committee, said there is a need to prioritize needs/goals. Al does not feel the FinCom can justify to WT citizens a cost of \$26K per student to be in the UIRSD. Skip mentioned the growing concern amongst residents of increasing taxes. Dr. Weiss commented that Mike Halt had worked very hard to rearrange classes so as not to completely fill the vacancies of three retiring teachers while trying to maintain the same level of service.

School committee members cited the changes in the 21st century classroom and the increased pressure to meet the requirements of standardized testing. They also made a request for assistance from the FinCom at their meetings to help them make cuts. FinCom members did not feel it was within their purview and the school committee should be able to handle their own budget.

Skip said that each year the UIRSD ends up with \$400k in E&D. This overestimating results in increased taxes. The money is refunded, but the taxes don't go down. Dr. Weiss responded that it is difficult to know what the state will provide - estimates differ significantly. The difference of anticipated revenue vs. actual is substantial.

Richard reiterated concerns about the disparity in WT enrollment to WT costs. Wants to see a clear plan. There was some discussion of operating separately from Chilmark. This decision is up to the school committee.

Al called for a vote. A motion was made and seconded not to accept the UIRSD budget. The vote was 4 for the motion, 1 abstention.

At 6:38 the meeting recessed to watch a video presented by Bob Lane of WT school students.

Meeting reconvened at 7:00

Al discussed the budget meetings schedule. He will send an updated schedule and a draft report this week. Next week the FinCom will be meeting with Executive Secretary Jennifer Rand, Tree Warden Jeremiah Brown and Superintendent of Streets Richard Olsen.

There being no other business, Richard made a motion to adjournment, Sharon seconded.

Meeting was adjourned at 7:02 pm.

Respectfully Submitted,
Nancy Rogers, Administrative Clerk