

Town of Warwick
Joint Selectboard & Finance Committee

March 11, 2019

Minutes

Members present: Lawrence Pruyne, James Erviti, Todd Dexter

Finance Committee Members: Chair Diana Noble, Laurette Crane, Gregory Brodski, Olivier Flagollet

Others present: HEART Committee member Tom Wyatt, PVRSD School Committee member Jessica Marshall, WCS Principal Elizabeth Musgrave, Susan Wright, Tom Ziniti, Julie Severance, Janice Starmer. Wiring Inspector, Brian Peters.

I. Call to Order

Selectboard Chair Pruyne & Finance Committee Chair Diana Noble called the meeting to order at 6:12 p.m. in the Town Hall.

II. Minutes

Due to this being a special session regarding PVRSD matters the Selectboard will address the minutes of the March 4, 2019 Selectboard meeting at their April 1, 2019 meeting.

III. Presentations and Discussions

1. Town Budget Preparation – Pruyne asked Chair Diana Noble about departmental budget requests. She reported that she had sent Emails out to all departments and has not had much feedback to date. She will reach out again this week. Noble asked what is required in the budget. Dexter suggested that she touch base with Town Coordinator David Young via Email and ask for an outline of the budget. Young had sent out a copy of the current FY2019 Omnibus Budget to the Fin. Comm. back in November. Noble acknowledged having a copy. Pruyne asked if Erviti would be willing to contact Police Chief David Shoemaker to set up an appointment with the Fin Comm for budget review, Erviti acknowledged he would. Erviti asked Dexter if the Highway Advisory Committee had taken up the Highway Department budget, Dexter stated that was not part of the HAC agenda and that Superintendent Larry Delaney was responsible for compiling the draft. Dexter will reach out to Delaney about making an appointment with Fin Comm.

2. School Related Matters – Pruyne asked Fin Comm Chair Noble about the PVRSD projected budget for FY2020, and what, if any increases were under consideration. Noble explained that the School Committee is looking at a 1.65% increase per town with no school closures. Pruyne said that a 1% increase to the current budget equates to approximately \$150,000.00. Susan Wright had said the final figures for the PVRSD budget could not be finalized until the loan has been sent to the district. It may be possible the figures may be presented at the March 14, 2019 School Committee meeting. Julie Severance said she was under the impression the loan could only be taken out over a 10-year time period of time. Dexter bought up the letter dated February 14, 2019 from the Northfield Select board and Fin Comm asking for a 5-year term to be considered by the School Committee for the loan repayment. No action has been taken to or any response regarding the request. School Committee Member Jessica Marshall said the state has said the loan will be taken over a 10-year period. Marshall said the committee has not seen the actual paperwork from the state, she also noted that the 1.65% increase to the budget includes the loan payment for the first year.

Noble said the Fin Comm wants to present the PVRSD budget to residents prior to the ATM. She wants transparency of what to expect. Susan Wright suggested that the loan portion of the budget be separate from the operating budget, so voters have a clear understanding. She also noted that the warrant article should be presented all together for voting, separation was only to show the cost of the loan outside of the actual budget.

3. Fire Department Wiring Project – Chair Pruyne stopped the discussion from School Related Matters to close on a request from Brian Peters. Peters asked permission of the board to install the permanent electrical service at the new fire station. He said National Grid wants the temporary service removed. Peters would like to ask National Grid to allow the service to remain until warm weather so he can better install the permanent service. Pruyne asked what the cost would be to install the service; Peters estimated it to \$3500.00. There was a consensus of the Board to allow Peters to move forward with the installation work.

4. Discussion of School Related Matters Resumed by Chair Pruyne – Pruyne asked School Committee Member Jessica Marshall about School Committee input regarding the loan and if it were part of the agenda for the upcoming meeting this week on the 14th. Marshall said the committee anticipates the loan paperwork will not be in place by Thursday, therefore discussion will not take place. They are waiting for the state to send the paperwork to the District office. Janice Starmer asked if an actual date had been set for a school closure vote, Marshall said that has not been discussed yet. Tom Wyatt said the committee is under an extremely tight time line and it most likely will come up as soon as the loan paperwork is in hand. Marshall said the

committee will be spending a good part of the agenda in executive session with the Teacher's Union on Thursday and the agenda was packet with topics.

Diana Noble asked about an agenda item allowing the Warwick Fin Comm and Selectboard to speak with the School Committee instead of only using the limited time slots during the public comment segment. Noble said she and Chairmen Pruyne should send a letter to the School Committee Chair Susan O'Reilly-McRae requesting time during the scheduled meeting to present questions and concerns before a closure vote is considered. Pruyne agreed. Tom Wyatt suggested that the letter include Finance Director Tanya Gaylord and Superintendent Jon Scagel.

Fin Comm Member Gregory Brodski said the proposed PVRSD budget does not make sense to the Finance Committee. Brodski said WCS has 58 students this year, of that 28 are school choice bringing in a total of \$135,000.00 in revenue. The district, according to Brodski, believes all WCS school choice students will remain in FY2020. He said the savings to the PVRSD budget of \$200,000.00 by closing WCS do not work. WCS Principal Elizabeth Musgrave disagreed saying the district is not anticipating all choice students returning. Musgrave said Northfield Elementary has been planning for classroom expansions and anticipates teachers to transfer from Warwick. Musgrave said if choice students do not transfer, staff cuts would have to be made and class sizes will be reduced. The question was raised about community support letters to keep WCS open being read and discussed at the School Committee Meetings. School Committee Member Jessica Marshall said letters do go to the Committee, but not discussed at committee meetings, nor do members get copies. Laurette Crane brought up the School Choice revenue side of the budget. She said it is not shown in the budget and it is hidden only to be used as an offset for health insurance benefits. Noble said it is not shown in the insurance benefits portion either. Brodski said the budget should detail the school choice numbers and detailed savings from school closures along with who is responsible for the proposed savings if they are not met.

Olivier Flagollet said the savings from school closure is a false narrative, that the District has no idea how much money will be actually saved. He noted that Gaylord says savings will be realized year after year and services will be added back into the budget. Flagollet said this does not make sense. Flagollet also said the \$250,000.00 in contractual salary step increases each year also offsets any savings. Noble said a minimum of a five-year budget projection is needed. Brodski said a ten-year projection should be set and reviewed in five years, he feels the district has no idea if these budgetary changes will work long term. Marshall said the budget sub-committee has crunched numbers and Gaylord has done some projections. Flagollet said he recalls Gaylord had stated at a previous Select board meeting that closing WCS would only by the district two years. Noble stated she has been attending the budget sub-committee meetings and they are not looking forward. She said if they are not looking at a five-year plan then school closures should not be on the table. She noted that WCS has only been projected at a

\$200,000.00 savings if closed, and that number is still disputed. Crane mentioned that student numbers have been falling for over the past 12 years and that it was not just due to recent budget related cuts. When Vernon, VT closed the Vermont Yankee Power Plant years back over 300 students left the district causing cuts to the budget. Marshall said there was a mass exodus was a huge issue. Marshall discussed students leaving the district and how it needs to maintain good programs to keep and attract new students.

Elizabeth Musgrave brought up the point there is a large difference between the PVRS and Elementary school budgets. She said the former Superintendent, Ruth Miller was forced to make the cuts to keep town assessments in line. She stated that the Elementary Schools were already at minimum funding. She is extremely concerned about the school choice population and how the pending decision to close WCS might affect their decision to stay at the school if it does remain open. Musgrave said we need a decision to keep WCS open for five years from the School Committee, so those students do not leave. Dexter said these are the kinds of discussions that need to take place going forward and that we need to focus on the minimum requirements to keep WCS open.

Pruyne moved that topics of discussion with the School Committee should be sent to him and Diana Noble by Email. Susan Wright asked that accurate closure numbers be acquired from Gaylord prior to meeting with the School Committee. Wyatt pointed out that moving costs and unemployment figures have not been incorporated in the school closure equation. Musgrave also said if we receive full school choice finding from those students would make a difference.

5. Planning for the Closure of our School - Noble said the proposed district agreement may or may not be up for a vote this spring. She said the HEART committee has made several revisions to the proposed agreement and the School Committee must take action by reviewing and making any necessary changes before a vote takes place. This new agreement will make it extremely hard for a district member school to leave the district whereas the current agreement has no terms or conditions for leaving. Dexter brought up the question which has been posed at previous Select board meetings about leaving the district under the current agreement. Wyatt said the town would have to pay its portion of the health and pension benefits. Wyatt said it would be 9% or \$3,000,000.00. Noble pointed out if we were to go on our own, we would also need a superintendent in order to move forward. Pruyne also mentioned Town Coordinator David Young has pointed out the need to also pay our share of the loan. Pruyne also said that the \$3,000,000.00 is a wash weather Warwick leaves the district or not.

Erвити said closing the school does not solve the budget problem. He said budget alignment is the solution. Crane said the Berkshire County Towns are working on forming a mega school district. Crane also asked about the \$90,000.00 Salary PVRSD Finance Director Tanya Gaylord takes in

and her responsibility after the school district issue is behind us, and what her responsibility will be. Marshall said the School Committee has already discussed this, her job will be planning a 5-year plan for the district.

Pruyne brought up the feasibility of the six-town district with Gill/Montague and PVRSD. He said it may not be financially feasible. Populations are still low and even with a six town combine district the student population is projected at 1700 Students, which does not meet the state minimum number of students. Pruyne feels that WCS leaving the district would be most healthy decision for the town.

Wyatt said Senator Jo Comerford is starting discussions on a state bill known as the “Promise Act”, which is a bill about school related issues throughout the Commonwealth. Wyatt said discussion will take place at the Gardner Auditorium in the Statehouse March 27th. Comerford is looking for letters, emails and any form of communication to make voices in Western Mass heard. This is a public forum, and anyone can attend.

Pruyne asked for ideas to be considered for discussion with the School Committee. Wyatt said Warwick spent over \$1,000,000.00 on Warwick Community School, future Green Communities money would evaporate if the school is closed. Susan Wright said WCS does not have a declining student population, Janice Starmer said we are the only Tier 1 school in the district. Julie Severance said each individual School Committee Member should receive an e mail from Warwick stating all savings measures, so they understand them. Marshall said she would like to see the cost savings list also be included in the School Committee Meeting Packets.

Dexter brought up the five-year contract just awarded to Superintendent Jon Scagel which has a 5% increase in years 2,3,4 & 5. He noted that the HEART Committee has sent a recent letter dated February 14, 2019 to the School Committee asking for an explanation. At the request of the Selectboard at their March 4, 2019 meeting, the letter has been requested by Warwick Town Clerk and Town Secretary Rosa Fratangelo to Northfield Finance Chair Lois Stearns to be taken up at the 4-town meeting, scheduled for March 18, 2019 in Bernardston. Erviti said the school committee did it for the stability of the district; Wyatt agreed but he stated the concern is the increase in pay.

Adjournment

Erviti MOVED to adjourn at 7:55 p.m. Dexter SECONDED. Motion CARRIED 3-0-0

Documents consulted at this meeting:

Meeting Agenda

Notes taken by Todd Dexter, Clerk