

West Bath School Administrative Unit

Board of Directors Meeting Minutes

May 20, 2020 at 4:30 PM (Remote Meeting)

Members Present: Keith Hinds, Robert McDaniel, Joanne Powers, Ashleigh Randall, and Mary Wallace

Members Absent: None

Others Present: Emily Thompson

Call to Order:

The meeting was called to order at 4:30 PM by Keith Hinds.

The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

Comments from the Chair:

Mr. Hinds said that he wanted to take a moment to thank staff, teachers, custodial, and food service staff. He said that we may not be in the school building day in and day out, but it is obvious how hard everyone is continuing to work. He wished to recognize that the hard work is noticeable and it is appreciated. He said that the staff is very much engaged and tuned in to the well-being of our students.

He said that before the budget is read, he wished to acknowledge that it is an incredibly challenging time to put together the budget. He said the finance committee has met numerous times and is trying to get the best plan together to put forward. He said that it might not be the plan that everyone envisions for the first reading, but that the process had to get started somewhere. Mr. Hinds said that the board is very aware of the impact of the school budget on the community and is trying to be responsive to the community needs as well. He said he wished to acknowledge the extra hours the superintendent has put into this process this year.

Adjustments to Agenda:

Mr. Hinds said that he had forgotten the most important part of the meeting and needed to back up to do a verbal roll call. All board members were present.

Public Comments:

None

New Business

1. First Reading of the School Budget

Mrs. Thompson commented on how long the process has been, as the budget was prepared for a March town meeting, prior to being delayed. She said that the initial budget has changed some since it was developed, due to the concerns emerging for COVID-19 and reopening the building. Mrs. Thompson said that the initial budget that was presented to the finance committee's consideration included an increase to the local contribution of \$188,895.75. The budget included:

- 1 more day per week of social work/counseling services to meet IEP goals and social emotional needs
- roofing allocation for a reserve fund - setting aside \$45,000
- a proposal for hiring custodial staff
- \$126,971.64 increase for 6-12 tuition based on enrollment

Through several meetings and adjustments, the finance committee:

- removed roofing allocation
- removed increased social work services
- cut back on supplies and equipment
- removed custodial proposal
- adjusted tuition to be 3% increase with 2 additional students per level
- removed increase to board stipends that had been requested by the auditor
- removed technology upgrades to be managed in a different way
- removed gym door facilities project
- removed \$5,000 increase to food service account (recommended by auditors)
- decreased supplies, materials, professional development accounts

This brought the budget to an approximate 2% increase or an increase of \$68,043.47.

Mrs. Thompson commented on the challenge of trying to plan for business as usual, but with the need to also consider that the fall may start up again remotely or that there may need to be a combination of two systems.

Mrs. Thompson walked through the budget line by line, noting the changes in cost centers overall and individual lines. She referred to budget documents dated 5/18/20. Additions in the budget since the 2% increase had been the increase of the school nurse from a day per week to 4 days per week to support the health needs of a student and take care of COVID-19 concerns, and an increase to transportation to allow for 4 additional runs per bus to allow for social distancing based on the current rules. She referred to the ESY rules that were just released and conversations with Bath Bus that may allow for only 2 additional runs per bus to be held, and said that the transportation budget had been offset by a prior reduction made in special education transportation.

Mrs. Wallace said that if the rules are so strict around busing, then it is hard to believe that students will even attend school and be socially distanced. Mrs. Thompson said that the guidance for the school year has yet to be received, but the current ESY guidance lays out how students enter the bus, sit on the bus, exit the bus, stand outside the building, and

stagger the entrances so they are not queuing. Mrs. Thompson explained some of the ESY guidance that is informing the budget, such as 2 staff members for every 10 students, health and wellness checks for all staff and students, working in pods of students and staff so there is not cross contamination between classes, teachers rotating into classes rather than students moving out so there is not hallway exposure, and rules around the playground. She said some schools are talking about not having every student attend everyday, but that in 2 months the state could also be in a very different place, which makes this ever so challenging. The school needs to budget for what they need if it was business as usual, but also plan for the contingencies, while being mindful of the needs of the community. Mrs. Wallace said that she had a hard time believing that if they need to be that distanced on the bus that we can program for them at school and it would be likely that some would attend on one day and others on another day. In that case the transportation costs would not increase because not all of the kids would be going everyday.

Mrs. Thompson said that she said that the place to start is worst case scenario, but that another model being discussed is with half the students coming in the morning and half in the afternoon so that all kids have access to food everyday, so that still doubles the bus runs.

Mr. McDaniel said that in reading the summer guidelines, lunch time may be one of the biggest challenges. Mrs. Thompson said that was discussed just that morning at a staff meeting, and there's a whole host of challenges with allergies, contractual obligations, and coverage, but this staff is amazing and West Bath can figure this out, once the rules are known.

This budget or first reading had an increase to the local contribution of \$202,000 or 6.15%.

Mrs. Thompson acknowledged that this was not feasible given the current climate and hardships for the community and that there was a lot of work to do to decrease this budget further and prioritize the needs. She asked the board to think about tuition, prioritizing expenditures, reducing travel and staff development, reduce facilities work further, pull more from carry forward, and discuss reserve accounts with the new legislation in mind. She said that we need to mindfully plan how to move forward. kindergarten class needs to be planned for in regards to nursing needs and ed tech support, but she said she would post the positions as anticipated until there was a more concrete plan for returning in the fall. She said that have an initial plan of starting with a special education teacher in kindergarten to get the year set up correctly and they could potentially go back to school in September before hiring an ed tech.

Mrs. Thompson said that she had spoken with David Hennessey earlier in the week and it was a positive conversation. The budget advisory committee and the town are very aware of the challenges we are facing and are understanding of the complexity of it all.

Mr. Hinds thanked Mrs. Thompson for all she did to get to the starting point. He opened it up to the board for questions and ideas, before circling back to the items that Mrs. Thompson had already outlined.

Ms. Powers asked if the budget advisory committee is expecting reduced revenues from the town. She asked what they are suggesting the budget look like. Mrs. Thompson said that the board has not met with the budget advisory committee yet. But certainly the town would be looking at less revenue. She said she had had some preliminary conversations with Mr. Hennessey around what that could look like and how it would be handled, but that it might be a better conversation to have when the committee members are present in a workshop. She asked about staffing and whether there are staff members who have underlying health conditions who might not be coming back to work. Mrs. Thompson said that those conversations have not yet taken place, and she's not permitted to ask who might have underlying conditions. The guidance has to come out, the local decisions have to be made first. She said that the initial guidance from the state is that if there are staff members who can not return, and there are students who are not able to return, then those staff members manage the remote learning for those students. Ms. Powers asked if other than the school nurse, has the DOE recommended other staff be hired? She said she could not imagine managing the social distancing without hiring other staff members. Mrs. Thompson said that it is going to be challenging, no matter how we get there. She said that in some ways West Bath is in a good place because the school is small. She said she is not anticipating hiring more than the additional ed tech and the nurse.

Mrs. Wallace said that it is difficult for the board to make adjustments as this point because things are moving so quickly. She recommends the board wait until there is further guidance, and most is contractual and set in stone.

Mr. McDaniel said that he wanted to point out that everything has been cut down. The things that are questionable are the nurse and transportation. There's not an awful lot that discretionary. He said that finance committee has really cut back on some things that they'd like to have in the budget. He said he'd like to see it decrease if there is an opportunity, but that he does not see it.

Mrs. Thompson said again that this is where carry forward and conversations about reserve need to take place with the budget advisory committee. She said that she felt the board does need to discuss priorities. Mrs. Randall said that in reading the ESY guidance it mentions PPE supplies for staff. She asks if this has been considered. Mrs. Thompson said that she had initially reduced supplies in the maintenance line by \$1,000, but has added it back in. She asked if Mrs. Thompson felt that the cleaning contract would need to be increased to meet the current guidance? Mrs. Thompson said that she's comfortable with the staffing levels, and has increased the supplies. She said that it again underscore that this may not be the best time to move away from the contracted service provider, as they are going to have access to the best supplies and responsibility for meeting the guidance. Mrs. Randall asked if this budget takes into account federal funding that the town might receive, and has there been conversation with the town about the surplus, and diverting some of that as a stop gap?

Mrs. Thompson explained the CARES funds allocations. She said the state is getting 80% of the Title I allocation and is distributing 90% of that to schools, so West Bath will get about \$12,000. In conversations with the DOE, they recommend that with an allocation that small that it is not built into a budget, rather used for something unforeseen. She said that she and Mr. Bowdish had talked potentially about another set of Chromebooks for younger students if remote learning is to continue. Mrs. Thompson said that in terms of conversations with the town, she has spoken with Mr. Hennessey, but would prefer to have those conversations when the board is in workshop with the advisory committee. She said she had spoken with the town administrator, who said they would do revenue forecasting in May/June when the office opens back up to get a sense of how revenues are coming in. The town will be receiving federal funds as well. The school board is starting the process now, the budget advisory will join in the conversation next week, and we can then make decisions that are best for our community as a whole.

Mr. McDaniel said that it may be wise to have an COVID-19 emergency fund. Maybe the budget advisory committee would have some ideas around those lines. Mr. Hinds said that they did receive an email with a suggestion that maybe there's a warrant article that would allow the school board to make reductions to the approved budget prior to tax commitment being done. That is another possibility that should be considered. We need to be as creative as we can be as a school board and town to get the best and most appropriate school budget approved and trust and depend on each other to do the right thing moving forward so we minimize the impact to the tax payers. It is a tough time for a lot of people. He said he is concerned that those economic challenges are going to continue and the board needs to do everything they can to be a community and support each other through this.

He asked if the board wants to discuss any of those big tuition items that Mrs. Thompson asked them to consider: tuition, legal fees. Maybe we budget flat and go back to a special town meeting if something comes up? Board stipends - there are lot of people not getting the increase they deserve, and many who have lots their jobs. Maybe this is the year that the board does not take stipends. He said that he does not plan to accept his in the coming year. He said that he does not want to fall in the model of old where capital projects are put off, but this board has done a good job bringing the shine back to the school. He said he would prefer that he would defer capital projects for a year than diminish the educational quality or jeopardize the health and wellness of the students and staff.

Ms. Powers asked if lawyers need to be typically consulted during negotiations or if it's pandemic related. Mr. Hinds said that they had to consult an attorney for training and support during the last round because it was a new process. Mrs. Thompson commented that the process went very well, and she anticipated it running smoothly this time around as well, but given the complexities of negotiations having access to the attorney is necessary. Mr. Hinds said that with the rapid changes in employment law, this may be even more necessary this time. Ms. Powers said there are so many things that you can't anticipate.

Public Comments

None

Set Next Meeting Dates and Locations

1. May 27th - Remote Meeting - School Board of Directors Workshop with the Budget Advisory Committee to begin at 4:30 PM. A board meeting will be posted for after the workshop.

Adjourn

Mr. McDaniel made a motion to adjourn at 5:36 PM. Mrs. Randall seconded the motion. Roll Call Vote (5-0).

Submitted by,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Emily Thompson", with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Emily Thompson