

School Committee Meeting – Thursday, January 11, 2007
Summary by Kathy Wallace, Education 411

SCHOOL COMMITTEE MEETING 1/11/07

On Thursday January 11, 2007, John Antonucci, Superintendent of Schools, presented the 2007-8 proposed budget to the School Committee. This is the first of many steps in the budget process and the public has many opportunities in the next several weeks and months (schedule below) to ask questions or seek clarification on any topic. Residents should know that they can contact the administration or School Committee (contact info below) at any time. Education411 is also a resource for information.

The complete FY08 Budget Presentation and Proposed FY08 Executive Summary can be found on the district website www.westwood.k12.ma.us. Please review the comments below in conjunction with the full documents to get the complete background.

The conclusion of the administration is that a \$2.9 million override is needed. As a review, in 2006-7, Westwood laid off teachers, cut programs and raised fees. We needed to achieve \$1.3MM in cuts on a level service budget. Impacts were felt across the district in Elementary, Middle and High Schools. To quote the Superintendent, we are at a "breaking point" and are "playing catch up".

...SCHOOL COMMITTEE/ADMINISTRATION DISCUSSION

The School Committee will conduct full budget deliberations on Thursday January 18, 2007. The following preliminary comments were made by School Committee and Administration members after John Antonucci's presentation:

- Most of the proposed teaching positions are restorations in staff to bring us back to staffing levels of 5 years ago.
- Because High School programs were eliminated, the principal is sending a letter with college applications to indicate that a student was not able to take a class because of Westwood's budget situation. Although this letter is a good initiative, there is concern that Westwood seniors will be at a disadvantage in the selection process.
- Because we need to replace outgoing teachers with less experienced teachers at lower salaries, Westwood is not able to interview some of the higher caliber candidates because of limited budget dollars. If they receive 100 resumes for a position, they cannot even look at 25 of the resumes.
- The teachers' contract was the lowest three year settlement in the region. The teachers' vote indicates they want the town to spend money on more teachers, not more to the teachers that we have.
- Our High School foreign language offerings are limited, compared to other districts.
- Teachers are slower returning work because of the large class size.
- Supplies are purchased collaboratively with other school districts and they get 63% off of retail prices.
- Westwood collaborates with 42 other towns to buy heating oil.
- 2002 was the last operational override that passed in Westwood and since 2003, we have had a 2.31% budget increase per year. (See page 6 of the Executive Summary)
- The Superintendent and SC will provide supporting detail for every dollar that they are seeking.
- It is important to look beyond newspaper headlines to understand the need for the override request. We need to think about why people move to Westwood and what kind of district we want to be.

...PUBLIC PARTICIPATION AT 1/11/07 SC MEETING

1. How do you manage the turnover budget number, i.e. attempting to hire at a lower salary than outgoing personnel? This is not done on an individual basis but is achieved in total for new hires. Last year, we had 33 new hires (not adds to staff) and they had to hire at \$180,000 less than the outgoing staff.
2. Why is there a \$350,000 budget surplus? This occurs on the revolving accounts which are accounts where funds can be rolled from one year to the next, such as transportation. They estimate ridership on buses to project revenue and if the ridership is actually higher, then there will be a surplus in that account. It could potentially go the other way and the ridership could be lower than projections.
3. If the town is able to provide \$1.4MM in contributions to the school budget rather than the conservative projection of \$750,000, will a lesser override amount be requested? Yes.
4. Will the town hold back on the \$1.4MM that we need, because they think the school department will get the money in an override? That is a question for the Fincom and Finance Director.
5. Is there any discussion of doing 2 options for the override for funding of level service (\$1.4MM override) or program restoration (\$2.9MM override). It has been discussed but if we only go for \$1.4MM, we only get the inadequate level of service that we have today.
6. Would you consider raising fees if the override were to fail? We are maxed out on fees.
7. Have you published what the \$2.9MM override would be by household? Yes, see page 7 of the Executive Summary.
8. Could you elaborate on a comment made earlier on Time on Learning (TOL)? Are we meeting the standard? The State has a standard of 900 hours of instructional time at the Elementary and Middle Schools and 990 hours at the High School. At the elementary level, we just make the standard but that includes DEAR time (Drop Everything and Read). This is comparable to a study hall for Grades 1-5.
9. Last year, you cut buses. Will those changes stay? We have added back one additional bus, and the Deerfield will remain on the staggered schedule.
10. If we don't pass an override, is it correct to say that we still have to fund \$1.4MM to maintain the service that we have today? Yes, the amount of the cuts would be ultimately determined by the Town's contribution to the school budget which is currently projected to be \$750,000.