

December 2006 Meeting Summaries

Includes Fin Com notes from 12/11/2006 and School Com notes 12/14/2006

FINANCE COMMISSION NOTES

December 11, 2006

Notes submitted by Kathleen Clasby

Major Agenda Items

1. School Subcommittee Update
2. Westwood Station
3. Municipal Benchmarking

School Subcommittee Report

The school subcommittee noted that the budget season is imminent and that there will be more information and discussion at future meetings. The teacher's contract was discussed briefly. It was also noted that Westwood's teachers pay increases were among the lowest pay increases as compared to other neighboring towns.

Westwood Station

There was a lengthy discussion about the Westwood Station project and the Finance Commission's role in reviewing the project and associated warrant articles. The Finance Commission and the Town have hired the consulting services of Craig Seymour and RKG Associates (of Durham NH) to help assess the financial impact. Mr. Seymour's role is to critically assess all financial aspects of the plan including the underlying assumptions of the forecasts, identify risks, and to perform sensitivity analysis on the data.

Many "rough" numbers were discussed during the meeting, the preliminary estimate is that when "Phase 1" is completed (not sure when that will be), additional tax revenue would be in the \$7 million range and related new costs to the town would be in the \$2 million range. However many of the costs will come before the revenue as the town has to begin hiring people and developing the infrastructure prior to the realization of the new tax revenue. Town Finance Director, Pam Dukeman, stated that all Westwood Station costs would be classified separately from other town costs so that they will be easily identified. The Fiscal 2008 budget will include some costs related to this project. The project impact on the school system has not yet been determined. Cabot, Cabot & Forbes (CC&F) is funding a study to measure the impact on the school system. However, this study has not yet been completed.

There was also lengthy discussion about the possible need for "tax increment financing" (TIF). Many members expressed concern with granting CC&F a TIF and they concluded that this matter will be discussed in great detail when CC&F officially asks for a TIF.

FYI: What is a TIF? In short, a TIF is a reduction in future taxes to offset infrastructure costs (such as roads/water/sewer) incurred by the developer.

Municipal Benchmarking

Fin Com member, Brian London, presented the committee with a draft of town by town comparisons of various financial statistics. It is the committee hopes that using

these metrics will help the committee and residents understand how Westwood's municipal spending compares to peer group towns.

SCHOOL COMMITTEE NOTES

December 14, 2006

Notes submitted by Kathy Wallace

Agenda Items

1. Superintendent's Report
2. Enrollment Projections
3. Level Service 2008 Budget
4. Business Report
5. Public Comment

Superintendent's Report

Sheehan School Librarian Kahla Jordan has been chosen to serve on the Executive Board of the Massachusetts School Library Association as PR/Advocacy Co-Chair. The Executive Board establishes the direction and priorities of the organization and advocates for strong school library programs in Massachusetts.

High School Foreign Language Teacher and Department Head, Deb Roberts, recently had a four CD set and accompanying workbook published by the Bureau of Education and Research. The title is Strengthening your Foreign Language Instruction: Practical Strategies for Active Learning. Debbie is also a national presenter for the Bureau and conducts seminars throughout the United States.

SEPAC, Special Education Parent Advisory Council, recently held a parent meeting that was attended by 40 parents. This group had been inactive recently and the administration is hoping to once again have active participation.

The swimming pool is opened and lots of events are taking place. Check with the Recreation Department for the public schedule.

At the 12/22/06 Boy's basketball game, the gym is going to be rededicated.

Enrollment Projections

John Antonucci (JA) opened this discussion by stating that this report will not include any projections for the impact of Westwood Station (WS). This study was funded by Cabot, Cabot and Forbes (CCF), developer of WS. CCF gave the town \$80,000 to study enrollment trends and space needs. This study used only about 1/8th of the money. Why no WS info yet? First, we need a baseline for Westwood, to know what growth we would have had without WS. Second, CCF just filed their special permit application on 12/14, so there was no definitive information as to what types and numbers of residential units they were to build.

Consultant: Symmes, Manni and McKee and Merrimack Education Center (MEC)
Process: Talked to Town Clerk, Building Department and Planning Board (PB) to get information on birth rates, new construction and proposed construction. Look at events of the last 3, 6, 7 and 10 years.

MEC has done these projections for other towns and they have been "accurate and successful".

They looked at birth rates through 2004 and then used a rolling average for 2005 forward. They looked at historic student enrollment for 1990- 2006 and actual permits for 1995-2005, when there were 33 new permits per year on average. The PB shows 62 residential units have been approved and they assume these will be on line in 5 years. They also factor in turnover of the senior citizen population.

Resident Births: In 1990, there were 137, and on average for 1990-2004, there were 168. They project the birth rate to be 175 per year. The birth rate has been relatively flat.

Housing Permits: In 1997, there were 75 permits and in 2005 there were 12 permits, continuing a declining trend due to limited space.

Student Multiplier: They have a factor of .78 for each approved dwelling. Thus the 62 approved units would generate 48 school kids. During Q and A, this generated some discussion as to how a 3-4 bedroom home will only have .78 kids. Response includes that the houses will come online over a 5 year period, and they divide the kids across 13 grades K-12. They also verify this factor on the US Census 2000 data of school enrollment by housing type and housing by number of bedrooms. MEC commented that most new homes in Westwood are 3-4 bedrooms and there is anecdotal information of large families moving in. If you look at the entire housing stock, there are only .5 kids in existing homes.

Sales and Median Prices: Median selling price has seen a steady escalation with a slight drop recently. The years 1996-2000 saw escalating prices with a lull in 2001 and then a peak in 2003. They look at this for the affordability factor of housing.

Enrollment Projections

Total enrollment, in 1990, was 1712 and is currently at 3000 students. The "cohort survival" factor shows a continued slight increase. The cohort survival factor is tracking by grade to see how many students come and go in a particular grade, i.e. how many in K today will be in Grade 9, 10 years from now.

The Middle School(MS) has grown from 600 in 1990 to 695 kid in 2006. JA commented later in the meeting that the MS is overcapacity now. MS is projected to be at 718 students in 2016.

Total enrollment will increase by 3.6% over 10 years, with Elementary showing a slight decrease from 1506 students in 2006 to 1439 in 2016. The High School has 819 students in 2006 and is projected to have 973 in 2016.

Questions/Comments to MEC

How can you say that 62 new homes with 3-4 bedrooms will only bring 48 students?
Answer: The .78 student multiplier has shown to be a successful indicator

This data shows slow and steady enrollment growth at MS and HS. You don't always get correlation from Grade 8 to Grade 9. There has been a drop off but it has not been significant in the last 3 years. The HS was built for 1000 students.

Do you have data or projections by the current school districts in Westwood? No, they do not because, data will be inaccurate when you apply trends to a small universe of homes.

When you did this study in another town, did you go back to see how you did? There was not a clear answer to this question. MEC said they can only go back if they are invited back and gave an example of a study done in a town that had a lot of cranberry bogs. This land was not included as possible land for homes. The bogs were closed and houses built and the study was not correct but they had no way of predicting the land conversion from farm to residential. Westwood does not have large tracts of land like that, so there is little risk there. A comment was made that Hale is not restricted as conservation land. Net result, MEC says studies are accurate plus/minus 3-5%.

What about the echo factor, when senior citizens sell their homes and the homes are reoccupied by young families? The echo factor has existed for years and is captured in the trends.

A question was raised as to how many homes have children in them today? No one knew the answer but they will find out. An estimate was offered that 30% of the homes have kids in Westwood.

If this data is not broken out by neighborhood, then how can we do a space need study for the elementary schools? They don't identify what schools are impacted because they don't know the ages of the kids. If someone moves out, there is no way to know what age kids might move in. JA commented that they have baselines by school.

A comment was made that very few kids move in at the HS level and the growth is skewing to the younger grades.

MEC stated that 10% of the kids in Westwood are going to private schools.

Next Step

MEC will get the CCF report that was filed on 12/14 to see the breakdown of total housing by type and estimate of students and review how CCF arrived at those numbers.

Westwood Station is uncharted territory, there is no data for this type of development so they will have to look at comparables. A SC member said that since no real data exist, that the town must get contingencies from CCF so that if there is an unexpected impact on the schools that CCF will cover some of the expense.

An example was given of the Towers at Chestnut Hill that only generated 7 kids. Comment was made that people may have sold homes to school age families and moved to the condo and those kids are not in the data. There is not really a way to track that information.

Public Questions

When will the next phase of the study be done? Early spring.

Have you looked at the percent of Westwood homes owned by people over 75? They looked at homes owned by people over 65 and it is 16%.

LEVEL SERVICE 2008 BUDGET

John Antonucci (JA) presented a level service 2007-8 budget. The presentation should be on the website soon. A level service budget means how much will it cost next to year to merely keep the level of service that we have in 2006-7.

Key points: • Budget will officially be presented on 1/11/07 at SC.

- To keep level service, we would need \$1.4 million more or 5.08%. This is due to known obligations such as salaries, special education, transportation, utilities and enrollment.
- "Level of service is not adequate".
- It is early in budget process but at this time, the town projects they can contribute \$600,000 towards the \$1.4 million which only keeps level service.
- Just because needs have been unfunded, does not mean the needs have gone away. Example, HS class size, lack of AP classes, ES specialist cuts resulting in DEAR time, etc.
- "If we do not have an override, there will be draconian cuts".
- It is early in budget process and it is possible that State Aid might increase slightly and that the town might be able to contribute more than the \$600,000 that it currently projects.
- Cannot forget the capital budget. Need to maintain buildings. If we fail to maintain them now, we face larger expenses down the road.
- Watch the Community Newsletter for Av Green's article on class size
- Meetings: 1/11/07 Budget Presentation, 1/18/07 Budget deliberations and Saturday 1/20/07 Public Forum.
- Public needs to decide what type of school system they want in Westwood. JA encourages everyone to get involved.

Business Report

This report was very brief and verbal only. We are on target for all budget items for 2006-7 including the \$180,000 turnover number. This number is a budget offset of hiring new staff at lower cost from departing/ retiring staff.

PUBLIC COMMENT

A parent asked, if the Middle School is overcrowded now, what is being done? Modularity will be added at some point. Doesn't it take time to add them? Yes, if the space study confirms they are needed, they would be added for 2008-9.

It was mentioned that there will need to be 3 Kindergartens at Sheehan next year. Has the Downey K/1 combined class been successful and would this be possible at Sheehan? It has been very successful but it does not work depending on the makeup of the students. It will be considered.

Does Westwood maximize revenues on building rentals? Yes, our buildings are available and we have sought out theater groups but there is limited demand.

Have we looked at solar energy? When the HS was built, they looked at geothermal energy but the state almost precludes you from using this unless you get matching funds elsewhere. The state has its own requirements. For example, they have insulation requirements which is why we have some small windows on the HS.

A comment was made that the SC should make known the energy efficiency efforts that have been made as residents feel this is a growing budget item and how it is being managed.

How has the class of 2007 done on Early Decisions? It is still early but 1150 applications have been mailed. Next week ED should come in but kids have been accepted at MIT, Columbia, Holy Cross so there has been good news. Is the list of colleges public? Yes, it is available in the guidance office.

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