

Education411.org Newsletter

In This Issue

- WE NEED YOUR HELP
- E411 ONLINE!
- IMPACT ON SCHOOLS OF WESTWOOD STATION
- E411 FORUM: State Funding of Public Education
- IMPORTANT MEETINGS

E411 ONLINE!

Visit www.education411.org.

You will find all of our newsletters and meeting summaries, links to presentations, such as " A Look at Town Finances" by Pam Dukeman, Finance Director and an updated calendar of important meeting dates.

IMPACT ON SCHOOLS OF WESTWOOD STATION

School Committee Meeting Notes
February 28, 2007

WE NEED YOUR HELP

Notes Submitted by Kathy Wallace

Agenda: Westwood Station (WS) Impact on Schools



Do you find our emails to be informative and timely? If so, please tell your friends and neighbors. We would like to increase our mailing list to help Westwood fully understand the issues facing our schools. Our mailing list currently reaches over 475 homes. Please help by

Nancy Hyde, Selectman, and Steve Rafsky, Economic Development Advisory Board, presented an update on the negotiations with the developer, Cabot, Cabot and Forbes (CCF) as it relates to the school department. Ms. Hyde and Mr. Rafsky also made a presentation at the February 8th School Committee meeting, which was summarized in the E411 newsletter dated 2/14/07 and is available on our website, www.education411.org.

Presentation by Nancy Hyde, Selectman

The focus was on the residential component, which is part of the three legged stool: Residential, Retail and Office. In particular, how will the school department deal with a possible influx of school age children? In considering the financial relief, the key points are school age children, the echo effect (empty nesters selling their house to a young family and moving to WS) and the impact on the operating budget and space

newsletter to those not currently on our list and recommend that they join.

Thank you for your support and feedback.

Join our mailing list!

Join

(capital needs).

CCF funded the demographic and space study, that included an evaluation of current space needs and the impact of WS on space. (E411 note: The space study has not been presented at a public meeting to date.) The developer, Planning Board and Selectmen had 3 different consultants. All three have the same conclusion: that the impact will be minimal on the schools. They looked at comparable developments in and out of state with high quality school systems. With the potential for 1000 units, each consultant projected 54 school age children.

Ms. Hyde stated that Westwood is in the process of negotiating mitigation to protect the town's interest. Today we have space needs. We have a highly populated middle school and elementary schools with no art or music rooms. Westwood still needs the override money that will be voted on at the Town Election. This mitigation does not take away the needs that exist today. WS is not a done deal so neither is this mitigation agreement.

Assuming the override passes, Ms. Hyde wants to dispel the myth that the WS money has been spent 10 times over. WS money has not been spent. There are lots of ideas, but there is also a lot of fiscal discipline in this town. Ms. Hyde said that we have deferred capital maintenance, we need to increase reserves and our free cash is not high enough. There will be a thoughtful process to provide stability.

Westwood has been negotiating this mitigation for a few weeks. The Planning Board expects to hear about the WS fiscal impact at the 3/13 meeting. This is why this particular SC meeting was squeezed in.

Presentation by Steve Rafsky, EDAB

WS has been 10 years in the making and

it had to be mixed use to succeed. The town is imposing many things on CCF, and that is why CCF is seeking the Tax Increment Financing (TIF). Please refer to E411 newsletter of 12/14/06 on www.education411.org. Why should Westwood grant the TIF? By offering the TIF, we can extract a lot of things. Westwood has looked at a lot of projects and mitigation usually only refers to traffic. Westwood has looked at environmental issues, revenue hurdles and school age children as additional mitigation factors. Instead of believing projections, we need to protect ourselves, Rafsky said.

PROPOSAL

Westwood proposed a linkage fee to CCF. If CCF wants to come to Westwood, we will ask them to provide a \$3 million deposit to the town for the school department to use for capital considerations, not tied to WS. These discussions are subject to the following: 1. School Committee Agreement 2. Permit Process Completion 3. The viability of the project after the permitting process (if changes were made to project).

This will all be known before the first shovel goes in the ground.

Why is there a \$3 million contribution to be used for capital needs? If the impact to the schools is small, then rather than focus on mitigation throughout construction, Westwood thinks it is better to get an upfront payment. Also, there would be an additional \$1 million payment that could be used for operating or capital costs. In exchange, Westwood has additional control if the number of school age children is higher. If there are more than .22% students per unit, then Westwood can stop residential development. Even if CCF has a permit for 1000 units, the Selectmen can stop the construction if there are more than .22% school age children per unit.

In addition to the \$3 million and \$1

million, Westwood has asked CCF for a third fund of \$2 million to be held in escrow in the event that the number of school age children reaches 100. At completion of the project, if there are not 100 school age children living at WS, the \$2 million would be returned to CCF.

Why is CCF doing this? These are not gifts, they are negotiated amounts. From CCF's perspective, they need bank financing and they need predictability without unrecorded liabilities.

What is the significance of .22%? If there are more than .22% school age children per unit at any point during construction, this is a major trigger that will stop the project. That said, the goal is not to stop children, but is to be able to afford children.

SCHOOL COMMITTEE QUESTIONS

Q: What happens if there are more than 54 school age children but less than 100?

A: There is no access to the \$2 million escrowed funds provided by CCF.

Q: Will the \$3 million be controlled by the SC? What can it be spent on?

A: The \$3 million is for capital costs and the \$1 million can be spent on operating or capital costs.

Q: What is the process to get at the money? Does it require town meeting approval? The Superintendent needs the ability to respond to a problem quickly. If students move in during the summer, they need to hire a teacher for September and cannot wait for town meeting.

A: The \$3 million will likely be in a stabilization fund that would require town meeting approval while the \$1 million could be accessed.

Q: How do children in a leased condo count?

A: All children count regardless of who owns the unit.

Q: What if school age children with special needs move in and have a \$200,000 bill for a private residential placement?

A: No clear answer was given.

Mr. Rafsky commented that CCF has incentive to sell the units; they make money when the unit is sold. Phase One will include 450 units above retail. Phase Two will include 550 units that will be pre-sold before construction. There will be one and two bedrooms over retail in Phase One.

Q: Can unit owners lease their condos?

A: Don't know, that may be restricted by the condo agreement.

Mr. Rafsky stated that CCF will provide annual reports on the school age children living at WS.

If Westwood issues permits for less than 1000 units, then the school impact negotiated amount will go down.

One reason that Westwood is considering the TIF is that Westwood is requiring that 100% of the infrastructure be built upfront.

Q: Why use the .22% ratio to stop the project instead of a number of children?

A: The project can be stopped if it is on a pace to produce a high number of children rather than waiting until the children have moved in.

Q: If the 3 consultants are so sure that it is 54 or fewer children, then why do we have to wait to 100 children to be compensated? Can we drive the number of children down to 75 children?

A: The ratio of .22% was agreed upon. CCF started lower and Westwood started higher.

Q: If there are fewer than 54 children, do we have to give the money back?

A: No.

A SC member commented that there have

been other developments in town that produced a lot of school age children and they gave us no money for the schools.

Q: Can you tell us that once the 450 units are built, that we will have positive net revenue coming to the town?

A: Yes, there already is a positive impact. This is 135 acres that was virtually vacant. CCF has agreed that they will not seek any tax abatements because of the vacancies. This has raised the assessed values.

In response, John Antonucci commented that he is not comfortable with the current revenue picture for the town.

Q: Will Westwood's state aid be affected by the increase in the assessed valuation of property? (Note: This question was raised at the E411 forum on 2/26 on the State Funding of Public Education).

A: This is unknown and is a Mass Department of Revenue question. A SC member felt that this would not have an effect.

Q: If the permits are granted, when does the school department get the \$3 million?

A: When CCF begins vertical construction.

The \$3 million would go to a capital stabilization account that was established 2 years ago at Town Meeting but has a 0 balance because the override did not pass. It requires a 2/3 vote of Town Meeting to spend the money.

Q: When does Westwood get the \$1 million?

A: As soon as CCF begins vertical construction.

Q: Who gets the interest on the \$2 million held in escrow?

A: No definitive answer was given. It could be 15 years before the money is awarded to Westwood or released back to CCF.

Q: What is the number of bedrooms per

unit? Will there be dens that could be used as a bedroom? What is the square footage of the units? Any over age 55 units?

A: 950 units will be one and two bedroom and 50 units will be three bedrooms. The floor plans, square footage or over age 55 for units were not known.

Q. What happens in 10-15 years if WS impacts the schools?

A. Westwood will have to deal with that through taxation.

Q. What other support is CCF providing to Westwood?

A. There are 3 components: Public Safety, \$4.6 million, the largest share, Schools, \$4 million and Municipal, a little over \$1 million.

The School Committee concluded their Q and A, by asking what Ms. Hyde and Mr. Rafsky wanted from SC. It was stated that this needs to go before FinCom on Monday March 5th, and they want a signal that this is where they should be going. The SC should indicate that they support the magnitude and upfront money of this proposal or that they prefer to track the student population over 15 years and go to the developer to seek mitigation as needed. A formal vote or clear signal was suggested. SC was concerned that there had not been ample time for public comment. Ms. Hyde replied that this meeting afforded public comment and it has been possible at other hearings.

A SC member suggested moving the 100 target to 75 school age children or driving up the \$2 million escrow account to \$3 million to give CCF a bigger incentive.

The urgency of a consensus was reiterated as there is a Fincom meeting on 3/5 and a Planning Board meeting on 3/13 and the Planning Board wants a report by 3/9. Ms. Hyde suggested that the SC could frame their decision such that the WS steering committee would try to do better. John Antonucci said that he is

extremely comfortable with the numbers and the SC does not really have any other choice.

A SC member suggested that they not vote on 2/28 to see if they can do better with CCF and to get more public knowledge of the proposal. It was stated that the public can express comment via phone calls to SC members and attend the 3/5 and 3/13 meetings.

The SC voted unanimously to accept this proposal with the request that the WS Steering Committee try to get more compensation.

PUBLIC COMMENT

E411 Note: This meeting was not advertised as extensively as regularly scheduled SC meetings and there were 5 residents and 2 members of FinCom at the meeting.

A resident expressed concern that publicity about this compensation from CCF will confuse people about the need for an override. The answer was that this is far from a done deal and the money will not be paid until FY2009 at the earliest. The need for the override remains unchanged.

A resident expressed concern that we have not yet seen the results of the space study. The Middle School is busting at the seams, and that it should be worked into the mitigation agreement that we have space needs today.

A resident asked if the methodology, to calculate the 54 children and what comparables were used, was available in a public document. The special permit document is available at the Main Library.

A resident asked if the administration was comfortable that the increase in assessed valuations of WS would not cause a decrease in the amount of state aid to Westwood as stated earlier in the

meeting. The reply was no. They are not comfortable and it needs to be reviewed. E411 Note: This question was raised at the E411 forum on 2/26/07 and the Associate Commissioner of Department of Education indicated he was not an expert on the particular topic and that it could have an effect and that the question should be reviewed with an expert on the topic from the Department of Revenue.

A member of FinCom said that she felt that they needed to vote on this soon and it takes awhile to educate the public. They really need public input when spending the money. How confident can we be in the studies? Were all 3 consultants looking at the same data, is that why they got the same answer? Yes, they all looked at the same data.

What defines a child produced by the development? Does it include the echo effect? No, the child has to reside at WS. A SC member stated that she knows of a broker with 56 names of people who want to sell their home in Westwood and move to WS.

The meeting concluded by SC requesting that the WS Steering Committee members come back to them if there are any substantive changes.

E411 FORUM: State Funding of Public Education

E411's forum on the State Funding of Public Education, held on 2/26/07, was attended by over 75 people. Thank you to all who made the forum a success.

If you have feedback on the forum or suggestions for future forums, please email us at info@education411.org.

If you were not able to attend, the speaker's slides are posted on the E411 website and we will send out a meeting summary shortly.

IMPORTANT MEETINGS

Monday 3/5 7:30PM FinCom Meeting
(financial impact of Westwood Station)
Senior Center

Tuesday 3/6 7:30PM Selectmen's Meeting (finalize municipal budget)

Tuesday 3/6 7PM Planning Board Meeting (WS Transportation) 201
University Avenue

Tuesday 3/6 7:30PM Thurston Middle School PTO Meeting, John Antonucci will discuss the 2007-8 school budget, Middle School

Thursday 3/8 9:30AM Parents of Preschoolers are invited to meet Superintendent John Antonucci who will speak about the budget and transitioning into WPS, Deerfield School

Tuesday 3/13 7PM Planning Board Meeting (Fiscal impact of Westwood Station) Location to be determined.

Thursday 3/15 7:30PM FinCom meeting (municipal budget)

Thursday 3/15 7PM Parents of Preschoolers are invited to meet Superintendent John Antonucci who will speak about the budget and transitioning into WPS, Martha Jones School

Thursday 3/22 7:30PM School Committee Meeting High School

Monday and Tuesday 3/26 and 3/27 Fincom Public Hearings

email: westwoodeducation411@yahoo.com
web: <http://education411.org>

[Forward email](#)



This email was sent to lbrakke@comcast.net, by

Powered
by

westwoodeducation411@yahoo.com
[Update Profile/Email Address](#) | Instant removal with [SafeUnsubscribe™](#) | [Privacy Policy](#).

Education411 | c/o 74 Sterling Road | Westwood | MA | 02090