

Williamsburg Board of Selectmen

Joint meeting with Finance Committee and School Administrators

Wednesday, November 28, 2018, 4:30 p.m.

Present: David Mathers, Denise Banister and William Sayre

Others: Kristen Smidy, Stacey Jenkins, Paul Wetzel, and Charlene Nardi

The Board of Selectmen met with the Finance Committee Co-Chair Paul Wetzel and Principals Kristen Smidy and Stacey Jenkins to discuss items that increase the school budget. The discussions were to highlight issues created from state mandates and regulations. The group will bring items to Senator Hinds to ask for support from the State.

- Bus Contracts: Where can savings be found?
  - Rules and regulations prevent the district from creating creative routes/ transportation options which could reduce costs. Discussed contracts – making sure the language provides flexibility for the districts.
  - Bus companies must upgrade buses so often (5 years), and that cost gets that cost gets passed on to school
  - Public / private partnerships
  - Using regional transportation / options

Group concluded that it would be helpful to have the State conduct a study of student transportation (school and bus contracts) to determine where savings could be achieved. There is also interest in having the State look at public transportation in order to create opportunities and encourage the Franklin Regional Transportation and Pioneer Valley Transportation Agency to work together to better serve the Hilltowns and surrounding towns. Right now, those two agencies do not work well together to support services.

- Charter / Choice: The funding from municipalities to pay for students who attend either a charter school or choice out to another public school create competition between schools in neighboring towns and within the same district – compete for students. Schools have to be competitive to keep their student body in ways that wasn't necessary in the past. It doesn't foster good school to school partnerships and encourage sharing of resources.
  - It is necessary to advocate to keep the state cap on Charter schools. The State cap on Charter Schools is an artificial brake on those schools and is necessitated by the fact that they have an unfair advantage in competing for students with public schools. To make this competition fair there needs to be a level playing field in all areas by changing the following:
    - Charter school teachers should be required to have the same certification/ education as public-school teachers
    - Charter schools can select their student population and therefore have less students with special education needs (creates economic inequity because it is generally families with means that can transport a child to a charter school)

- Per pupil costs and cost charged to sending town for Charter school is significantly higher than what we pay per student in our schools. Choice out is \$5,500, Charter can be \$12,000 to \$17,000 per student depending on the school.
- Special Education / Mental Health / Social Service Issues: Noted that costs are increasing to schools to provide service. Contracting for services outside the district are extremely high. Mental health issues are rising with children and there is no shared cost with outside private agencies, no help in funding. It is suggested that we advocate for sharing costs with Dept. of Mental Health. Schools are responsible for transportation to and from school when students are removed from their home by social services and fostered in another community. This becomes an added unexpected cost to the school system.
  - State average for percentage of SPED students is 18%, HRHS is at 20%, Local school is at 14%
  - HRHS – cost is \$208,000, on
- Technology: Request the State to do a study on state reporting and needed software. Determine ways State can standardize and fund the costs of providing state mandated reports and data entry.
  - Data Collection: Every school has to buy software to provide state mandated reports. Why isn't the software standardized and provided by the State? Rural / small schools don't have the budgets to keep buying software and they don't have the personnel to assign the task of just data entry. The reporting requirements are time consuming and administrators don't feel that the schools benefit from the reports. (Administrators know their student body statistics without the reports the state sends back to them). It was suggested that schools in a region / district may be able to share a person to do data entry for all the different categories (ELLA, mental health, food service, nursing – couldn't the state help with supplying software? What is the value of this reporting? Who is benefiting? The State needs to look at this for areas to support and reduce costs and time.
  - Computerized testing for MCAS put schools in a bind to budget enough computers for all students.

Discussed ways to advocate to the State the needs of small towns:

- Asking for more technical support
- Asking for Allocations for western Mass communities who have limited resources
- Working together – advocate as a larger group (more towns, districts) – working together has a louder voice.
- Advocate for Shared services – not regionalization in the formal sense

The group agreed to focus on three things in discussions with Senator Hinds in regard to the school budget – Transportation, Special Education and Charter schools.

Other questions to ask Senator Hinds:

- **Rural Funding Grant:** Why did Williamsburg fall through the cracks on that grant funding?
- **Wealthy community Designation:** Why is Williamsburg considered a wealthy community? Where does that designation come from and what is it based on?

**Live Entertainment License Approvals:** Voted (DB, WS) to unanimously approve live entertainment to Burgy Bullets for Saturday, December 1, 2018 for a D.J. from 7 – 11:30 p.m. Voted (DB, WS) to unanimously approve live entertainment to Bread Euphoria for Saturdays, November 24, December 1, 8, 15, 22, and 29 for live music from 5:30 to 7:30 p.m.

**Police Officers:** Sergeant Soukup introduced Michael LeMoine and Mitchell Cichy, Jr. to the Board of Selectmen. Police Chief Wickland is recommending them to fill two of the part-time patrol officer positions.

The Board unanimously voted (DB, WS) to appoint Michael LeMoine and Mitchell Cichy, Jr. as part-time patrol officers for a term to expire on June 30, 2019 with the understanding that officers are at-will employees and there is a six-month probation period.

**Classification Tax Allocation:** The Board unanimously voted (DB, WS) to sign the Classification Tax Allocation form in which they certify that a public hearing was held on Thursday, November 8, 2018, to set one tax rate for the Town of Williamsburg.

**Eversource Land Purchase:** Discussed the closing for the Mill River Greenway park land purchase from Eversource and next steps with abutters.

Adjourned at 6:38 p.m.

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Board of Selectmen Clerk