

Finance Committee



Meeting Minutes from January 18, 2024

Members Present:

Chair- Kurt Fraczkowski

Vice Chair- Andrew Sealey

Clerk- Eric Sechman

Also in attendance:

Town Manager- Robert Pontbriand

Finance Manager- Barbara Tierney

ASRSD Superintendent- Dr. Adam Renda

ASRSD Asst. Superintendent- Charlie Caliri

ASRSD Finance Manager- William Plunkett

The meeting was called to order at 6:06pm.

Kurt asked if there were any comments or corrections that needed to be made to the meeting minutes from January 4, 2024. There were none.

Motion: Andrew Sealey made a motion to approved the meeting minutes. Eric Sechman seconded. Unanimous approval.

Charmain: Introduced Dr. Adam Renda, Superintendent of ASRSD who introduced Charlie Caliri, Asst. Superintendent to review the status of the Federal Entitlement grants that the district receives each year.

Caliri: Title 1-4 grants are based on low-income percentages within the district. Over the past 5 years there has been a 43% drop in the finding of the Title1-4 grants to the district. This has resulted in a drop in positions funded by these grants from 8.6 to 3.5 over that time frame. In addition, the district has been notified that the Title 1 funding will be dropping by at least another \$50k next fiscal year, and the Lura White school in Shirley will also be losing some finding next year. This is due to the change in demographics in the district as less students come from low-income and below poverty level households. They district believes that the numbers that the funding levels are based on are not accurate due to the FRL program that the state has enacted. As students automatically receive free breakfast and lunch, families are less inclined to complete the waivers which are reported to the state. This can result in inaccurate reporting and lowering of Title 1 grants.

COVID funding through the ESSER grants (I-III) helped to offset these losses. These ESSER II and III funds were to be used specifically for mental and social-emotional needs of the students. That funding will be completely ended as of September 2024.

Dr. Renda explained that the district is in a difficult place at the moment. As the demographics have changed the district has received less in grants. However, the district is not competitive enough to be awarded competitive grants. The district is working on a competitive grant in conjunction with Gardner that they would not realistically be considered for on its own.

Questions were asked about accurate reporting for FRL program. Dr. Renda reiterated that they are working with families to have as many as possible complete the waivers if they normally would.

Mr. Plunkett then presented the preliminary budget for FY25. The main drivers of budget increases are from an added \$768K for the loss of entitlement grants and ESSER funding and contractual salary increases based on COLA and step increases. The total preliminary proposed assessment to the towns is \$1,520,000, a 4.7% increase.

Question: Kurt asked for clarification on the contract status. Dr. Renda answered FY25 will be the 3rd and final year of the teachers' contract and the 2nd of 3 years for all other union contracts. He anticipates being notified by union representatives at this time next year to open negotiations.

Question: Eric asked if any educator positions or offerings have been cut to do budgetary concerns. Answer was no.

Question: Eric asked what impact the migrants in the motel have had on the district finances. Dr. Renda answered. 19 students entered the district due to the shelter. The biggest financial impact is on transportation costs. Students in the shelter have the option to attend their original school and ASRSD must provide transportation for them which can cost about \$500/day. Absorbing the students into the district has not been a financial burden. Dr. Renda stated that the state says they are to be reimbursed for the transportation costs as well as \$104/day/student and has been told that money should be arriving shortly although he remains skeptical. He also said that they did need to hire an EL support because some of the students do not speak English.

Chairman: Opened the meeting to public comment.

Robert Pontbriand asked for a preliminary estimate on the percentage of the assessment that would be Ayer's responsibility. Mr. Plunkett stated that the breakdown right now is 57% for Ayer and 43% for Shirley. Kurt added that would bring Ayer's portion to around \$900K.

Susan Copeland: Thanked the FinCom for giving their time and for their work. And hopes that we can as a district continue to help and support to the teachers and how we can continue to make the school district stronger.

Question: Andrew asked what the breakdown is per school- PH 550 LW 360, MS 388, HS, 417. Mr. Caliri stated that the enrollment at the HS has increased this year to over 400.

Chairman: Next item- the FY25 town budget process update. The budget draft will be available on the town website.

The next meeting will be next Wednesday Jan24 as a joint meeting with the Select Board. It will be a hybrid meeting if we cannot make it in person.

Andrew stated that we needed to decide hat department chair we would mee with next. Fire Chief Tim Johnston was in attendance and offered to present the fire dept budget at the next FinCom meeting on February 1, 2024.

Andrew added that he would like to discuss the proceedings from the Finance Committee members' other committee assignments to have them in FinCom minutes. Kurt stated that he would add that to the agenda for the FinCom meetings going forward.

There were no other public comments.

Motion: Andrew Sealey made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Eric Sechman seconded. Unanimous approval.

Meeting was adjourned at 7:17pm.

Minutes Approved 2/1/2024

Kurt

KURT FRACZKOWSKI

FINANCE COMMITTEE, CHAIRMAN