

SELECTMEN'S MEETING
TUESDAY, MARCH 29, 1994
2ND FLOOR TOWN HALL MEETING ROOM
MAIN ST., AYER, MA.

7:00P.M. OPEN SESSION

Present: Stephen M. Slarsky, Chairman, Selectman Jones and Selectman Hamel.

The Board met with the Ayer School Committee and the Advisory Board re: FY-95 School Budget.

Present for the discussion: School Committee: William Noeth, Armand Guarino, Russell Brown and Kathleen Kidder--Advisory Board: William Oelfke, Marion Smith and Coleen Norstrom--School Dept.: Jack Berberian, Asst. Supt., and Richard Warren, Supt. of Schools.

Chairman Slarsky opened the discussion by stating the purpose of the meeting was the FY-95 School Budget. Dr. Warren stated he was not aware that the School Budget was going to be discussed this evening. Dr. Warren stated the School Committee would be reviewing the FY-95 School budget on April 6, 1994. Mr. Higgins stated all budgets were due in January 31, 1994 and the Town has still not received Dept. 600 budget requests. Mr. Higgins stated Mr. Oelfke, Chairman of the Advisory Board had advised him of a potential for reducing the Vocational budget by \$200,000.00, which was relayed to him from the School. Mr. Higgins stated this reduction would greatly help offset the deficit the Town is projecting for next year. Mr. Higgins stated he had not received confirmation regarding this from the School Dept. Mr. Higgins advised everyone present that Town Meeting is only six (6) weeks away and recommended postponing taking action on Education Reform until the results of the law suit and legislative actions are known. Mr. Higgins stated this would allow time to balance the budget for FY-95 without any reduction in other services. The Board could also consider the prospects for funding priority projects.

Mr. Higgins reviewed with the Board his conversation with John Robertson (MMA's fiscal policy director & expert on Education Reform) who advises that the law specifies how much you must raise, but does not specify when the money must be appropriated. The Town would have until the end of the fiscal year (June 30, 1995) to comply. DOR Would Not allow the Town of Ayer to set a tax rate which is done in October of each year until we are in compliance. The law suit and the attempt at corrective legislation would certainly indicate a sincere effort to address a unique circumstance. Town Counsel rendered his preliminary opinion stating that the Board would have no individual/personal liability.

Mr. Higgins proposed that a specific figure be arrived at through discussions with the School Committee and the Advisory Board, and urged this discussion begin immediately since the School Committee is in the process of preparing its budget.

Mr. Higgins recommended that the local contribution portion of the budget be frozen at the current level (\$3.6 million) as opposed to increasing to the level called for in the formula (\$4.1 million). The \$500,000+- would give the Board and the Town the ability to balance the budget and address some of the outstanding needs. Should the Town lose the Court suit and the legislation the Board could call a Special town meeting to make the cuts necessary or call a Special Election to ask the voters for an override to avoid the cuts. Mr. Higgins explained if Town Meeting funds the budget at levels required in the current formula, we lose the urgency of our argument; the court and the legislature would see that the tough decisions were already made and be inclined to rule that the community could live with the consequences.

The Board reviewed with the School officials the enrollment figures for Fy-95. Supt. Warren stated the enrollment figure of 350 did not accurately reflect the enrollment figures for Fy-95. The School Dept.

AMCE