

Budget Committee
Minutes
May 17, 2011

Present: C. Barbera, T. Beard, M. Beck, R. Buckley, J. Burk, B. Cummings, C. Guagliumi, S. Heinrich, G. Krupp, A. Schneider and School Board liaison C. Ortega

A. Schneider called the meeting to order at 7:32 PM and led those present in the Pledge of Allegiance.

Welcome and Introductions

A. Schneider welcomed the new members C. Barbera, C. Guagliumi and G. Krupp and welcomed back T. Beard, R. Buckley, and J. Burk. He then asked everyone to introduce themselves.

Brief overview of Budget Committee Process

A. Schneider explained that the Budget Committee typically starts work in earnest in fall. He indicated that the School Board starts the process by giving a budget message to Administration which prepares a budget proposal for submission to the School Board. He said the Budget Committee has liaison subcommittees which meet with each department and then after the School Board has completed its budget proposal, the Budget Committee starts work on the budget in January meeting every week or every two weeks before finalizing a budget for presentation at a public hearing in February. He said that last year the Committee had thought about getting involved in the budget process earlier on and/or meeting more often.

Public Participation I

Nicholas Lavalley, Town Media Services Coordinator, invited the Committee to meet in the new meeting space at town hall. He offered three reasons for doing so:

1. Fiscal Responsibility – he said that arranging to tape Budget Committee meetings involves a lot of staff time for set-up and break-down, sometimes as much as 3 hours per meeting, a full staff week of effort per budget season. He also indicated that staff transports the needed equipment in their personal vehicles which could lead to a liability situation. In addition, he said his staff sets up at 5 PM, but the after-school program using the elementary school all-purpose room runs until 6 PM, necessitating moving the program.
2. Ease of use – he said that there is a projector in the ceiling which could be used for visual presentations, the microphones are hard-wired and a DVD or CD of the meeting would be available quickly for the person taking minutes.
3. Better recorded product - he said the number one complaint about “off-site” meetings was the quality of the taping. The new meeting room has a four camera robotic system in place, which result in a better quality product.

He also indicated that the town meeting room was readily available on Wednesdays if the Committee could change its meeting night. He said that, should the Committee need to stay with Tuesdays as its meeting night, he would work with Community Development to facilitate Committee use.

A. Schneider suggested that the Committee would make this an agenda item to think about either later in the meeting or at its next meeting.

Budget Committee Reorganization

S. Heinrich nominated A. Schneider for Chair. Second: J. Burk. There were no other nominations. B. Cummings called for a vote on the nomination. A. Schneider was unanimously elected chair.

S. Heinrich nominated B. Cummings as Vice Chair. Second: T. Beard. There were no other nominations. A. Schneider called for a vote on the nomination. B. Cummings was unanimously elected vice chair.

Process to Fill Vacated Seat

A. Schneider explained that by taking the oath as a School Board member, G. Markwell had vacated his seat on the Committee. He explained that, last fall when the Committee had had an opening, it submitted an article about the opening to the newspapers, cable and the School District website. The article requested that interested parties submit a letter of intent and then meet with the Committee for an interview. He said that only one person had expressed interest. He also said the Committee had had a second resignation just before the start of the budget process and had decided not to fill that seat. In addition, he said that the seat would only be filled until the April election, at which time, the seat would be elected for a one year term.

B. Cummings made a MOTION to use the same replacement process as last year. Second: S. Heinrich. MOTION PASSED unanimously.

A. Schneider said he would work with the Committee secretary to put out a notice about the vacancy and suggested that the Committee meet at 7 PM on June 14th to interview any interested candidates and fill the open seat. By consensus, members concurred.

Summer Meeting Logistics

A. Schneider asked members for their opinions on whether the Committee should hold regular meetings during the summer.

S. Heinrich said he felt summer meetings were a waste of time and noted that the School Board has been taking prior Committee suggestions and actions into account when preparing its budget which has resulted in an easier job for the Committee.

T. Beard asked C. Ortega when the School Board was giving its Budget Message to the Administration. C. Ortega replied he anticipated this would happen in September.

B. Cummings said if the Committee was going to send an advisory budget message to Administration, it should meet. Otherwise, he saw no reason to meet during the summer.

G. Krupp said the Committee shouldn't meet unless there is work to be done but that the members might want to consider following School Board meetings closely this Summer to see how the final state budget affects the District's budget.

The rest of the members stated if there is work to be done, the Committee should meet. Otherwise there was no reason to schedule summer meetings.

A. Schneider stated he would plan to schedule a meeting in late August. Additionally, he stated that he would contact DRA to see if he could schedule someone to provide an evening training at that August meeting.

G. Krupp asked what the Committee process was regarding member questions for information about the budget. A. Schneider requested that all members submit questions for the Administration to him and questions for the School Board to School Board liaison C. Ortega.

Other Agenda Topics

Meeting Location and Day of the Week

A. Schneider told the Committee that having School Board meetings in the town meeting room will be an agenda topic on a future School Board meeting, and he said he would like to hear School Board comment on this issue. He questioned whether the meeting room was large enough to accommodate the entire Committee.

G. Krupp asked why the Committee would defer to the School Board and said he thought it was a great idea.

A. Schneider said that last year the Committee had determined that Tuesday was the best meeting day for most everyone but that day might not be best this year. He suggested that members email him with their meeting day choices and stated that he and B. Cummings would visit the town meeting room to determine if the room was large enough to accommodate the entire Committee and provide sufficient working room for each member.

R. Buckley asked if members could also email A. Schneider with other questions or concerns about holding Committee meetings in the town meeting room.

S. Heinrich asked if the Committee meetings needed to be recorded for cable and wondered whether the high school videography classes might be able to record Committee meetings.

A. Schneider said he felt there was merit in recording the meetings, but also needed to find out whether the Town Media Services would still be willing to tape Committee meetings if the Committee decided not to meet in the town meeting room.

M. Beck suggested that the June 14th meeting might be held in the town meeting room.

State Budget Impact on School Budget for FY 2011-12

T. Beard asked C. Ortega to give the Committee an update on the state budget impact on the FY 2011-12 budget. He said he had been receiving phone calls from people that had received lay-off notices.

C. Ortega said that before Deliberative Session, the School Board had met with the town's state representatives and state senator to discuss the possibility that the new state budget could cut the amount of catastrophic and building aid the school district receives and require the school district to contribute more for retirement. He said in response the School Board had created a list of potential cuts that it might need to make should the need arise. He reminded the Committee members that the School Board had proposed a cut of \$501,000 to the budget in anticipation of this possibility at the Deliberative Session and the cut had been voted down. He said that over 70% of the School Budget is personnel related. He said that, by contract, lay-off notices must be sent out by April and that since the state budget has not been finalized, the School Board voted to send out some lay-off notices. He said that once the state budget is finalized, the School Board will discuss budgetary options, which could include hiring back those laid-off or making additional cuts.

T. Beard asked if there was a possibility that the state budget would be at impasse on July 1st.

J. Burk told the Committee that when the State Senate finishes its work, there will likely be a Committee of Conference which will have a goal of an approved budget by July 1st. She said that she had heard that the likelihood was good that state retirement will be paid at 25% and that school building aid and catastrophic aid will remain as budgeted.

Other

A. Schneider stated that new members would be receiving a school district email address and asked all prior members to confirm that their school district email addresses still worked.

In addition, he stated that members would be notified of date, time and location of the budget training, offered by the Local Government Center in case any member wanted to attend. He said this was an all day program for budget committee members, finance directors, selectmen and school board members, which many members have found helpful and for which the District would pay should any member wish to attend.

Public Participation II

There was none.

R. Buckley made a MOTION to adjourn. Second: S. Heinrich. MOTION PASSED unanimously.

A. Schneider adjourned the meeting at 8:45 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Pat Heinrich