

approved June 3, 2020 via Zoom Meeting

**Advisory Committee Meeting**

**April 1, 2020**

**Zoom Meeting Minutes**

Present: Arthur Frontczak; present, Jon Hurwitz present, Dave Lutes, Kristen Balash present, Brian Beachkofski present, Susan Klein present, Jackie Katz present, Mike Hough present, Blythe Robinson present, Todd Lindmark present, Kevin Kalkut, Paul Cochrane; School Committee and Susan Jacobson. In the Zoom audience Ed Haddad.

Arthur Frontczak called the meeting to order at 7:03PM.

**NORFOLK SCHOOL BUDGET**

Dr. Ingrid Allardi/Medora Champagne will present the Norfolk School budget tonight. The presentation material is available [www.mytowngovernment.org](http://www.mytowngovernment.org) please click on today's meeting date. Dr. Allardi said this was the same presentation shared with the public in March. They always begin the budget process by keeping the mission statement of the Norfolk Schools. During 2008 the town as well as the schools had a recession and had to make significant cuts. There were years where they had to present a 0% budget increase which resulted in both program cuts and staff cuts. Grant funding decreased by almost half a million dollars. Over the last few years they have been able to restore funding for new curriculum mandates and materials. They have partially restored the health education teacher. It is twice a week and two of every eight are dedicated to health instruction. Two IT positions have been collapsed into one position. Library positions have not been fully restored. They were not able to eliminate fees for transportation. The assumption of the State Legislation is that you provide safe walking/pathways to school which we do not have. They have eliminated the full day Kindergarten tuition, 85% of the cities/towns across the Commonwealth offer full day Kindergarten at no charge.

Dr. Allardi spoke about clerical reductions in both school offices and they have not been able to return/restore all of the professional staff. The average budget increase over the last 13 years it is 2.5%. It does take 2.5% to 3% to take care of contractual staff increase.

A graph showing per pupil spending across the State we were not able to keep up with that graph. We are about \$1100 under the State.

Data was provided with regard to benchmarking against other districts. We are now the lowest spending district except for Berkley, MA. Wrentham and Plainville are both paying more per pupil. We spend almost \$1,000,000.00 per year less across the State (towns that we are measured against).

They are working to lower the number that they have presented but since school has closed they have not been able to meet with the School Committee to try and present a budget of about \$30,000 less.

They do need to hire an additional teacher because of the influx of Kindergarten students. They will need a Paraprofessional to support that Kindergarten level.

There are students that are in the developmental delays and they need to have a receiving program that will meet their needs but building this program will keep students within the Norfolk School District and not have to send them outside of the district.

.5 Assistant Principal at each school the other half of their role will and is the Curriculum Director and with the increasing changes from the State and the changes in student discipline law, anti-bullying laws these positions are needed. They have delayed bring the request forward for a few years but at this point they feel those positions are critical to allow us to continue to provide the high level of education to the students.

Dr. Allardi said we are losing some staff to higher paying districts.

There is an increase in costs for furniture that is to outfit the new classroom for the larger incoming Kindergarten class.

They will not be placing a special education place holder they cannot come in at budget and have the place holder. Only 1% of the budget goes to out of district placements. That is significantly lower than other districts. Class sizes were discussed but can go up not all families have registered their children for school and some families will move to town from now until the start of school. Class sizes range from 19 – 22.9. They are some of the higher class sizes in the district.

Dr. Allardi said they share a Facilities Director and Assistant Director along with custodial staff and have staggered the work week and the schedule to reduce overtime costs.

The H. Olive Day just turned 25 years old the library furniture desperately needed replacement. Over February vacation the Facilities Staff re-laminated the tables and save about \$7,500.00. They are doing additional work in house and this has allowed savings in several areas. They are sharing some services with King Philip which allows additional savings.

They continue to work with King Philip, Plainville and Wrentham School Districts to collaborate on shared services to continue to reduce costs.

Charter School attendance has increased significantly when a student in Norfolk chooses to attend a Charter School the funding of \$15,000 of funding. If critical programs are cut and student leave the district they will continue to lose funding.

Dr. Allardi spoke about restoring positions and some additional curriculum the total cost is \$384,000 if they were able to do that. Technology is not keeping up with the replacement program put in place. They are not bringing these items forward at this time.

Norfolk performs in the top 18% of MCAS in the State. The class sizes are average they used to be below the state average.

Brian Beachkofski asked if the Assistant Principal were moved to full time where will the Curriculum Director load fall to. They would like to hire a full time Assistant and retain the part time curriculum role. They would be 50% at each school.

Dr. Allardi said they shift based on the increased enrollment. Kristen wanted confirmation on how that would change.

Ed Haddad 138 Maple Run asked if the Assistant Principals (the full time position) was in the budget. Dr. Allardi said it is in the budget proposal. He wanted to clarify if it was in the budget. Dr. Allardi said that the Assistant Principal she is proposing will back fill those roles.

Ed Haddad asked in light of what the world is going through now does she have a backup plan if funding from the town and the state did not come through. Dr. Allardi said that at this point it is too soon to determine what will happen with the economy. She said that the earlier proposal does include a worst case scenario it is a thoughtful plan that would obviously impact the students.

Brian asked if they were changing a server room into a classroom. They need an additional 2<sup>nd</sup> grade and additional Kindergarten. By enclosing and ventilating the room they get half of the classroom back. They are currently out space.

Ed Haddad asked about the technology and wondered if that cost could go through free cash. Dr. Allardi said they have budgeted for technology. They are going to hit a point where they will need to have a significant technology ask and that could potentially be funded through the Capital Budget. Dave said technology in small bites it is not a capital expense.

## **KING PHILIP**

Paul Zinni and Larry Azar will be presenting the King Philip School budget tonight. The presentation material is available at [www.mytowngovernment.org](http://www.mytowngovernment.org) please click on today's meeting date.

Paul Zinni and Larry Azar will start off by thanking the Norfolk Schools. The education process is K-12. If you build a house you don't start with a foundation and add the other sections as you go. Norfolk School professionals are always looking to create solid foundations.

The first section of the presentation spoke about accomplishments. Paul Zinni wanted to speak to the test scores at King Philip. The students are performing very well at many levels at each level the students are scoring much higher than the state. Massachusetts has been out-performing in this country. Massachusetts has paid to see how Massachusetts was doing as if it was its own country. Mass is outperforming the country and the world and you look at how King Philip is outperforming in both MCAS and SAT scores. All of the good news stories are available on the website.

Larry Azar discussed the number of students and class sizes. Class sizes vary in Middle and High School but the range is low 20's to 30's depending on the class. Norfolk has more elementary students than Wrentham for the first time in a very long time.

They are projecting a bit of a drop less than 100 students. Many of the other districts have one central office. KP is in the lower 3<sup>rd</sup> in spending they are 12% lower in the district. KP is covering the full cost of a central office and do not have the opportunity of shared services. This budget was put together prior to the current situation. If you go back 10 years KP was close to the other compared districts now we are trailing behind in that situation.

Metric spending was in the middle of the track now they are at the bottom vs. net requirement versus spending, KP is lowest again the group. If KP spent the way their neighbors are they budget would be significantly higher.

E&D funds were discussed state does not allow more than 5% they are in a fairly good place to be. They have put \$400,000 in last year and this year which will result in the E&D to be \$550,000. The revenue projection was the budget going up 3% but when you factor in that state aid is only going up to 1.6% additional funding will be required.

In 2018 items were cut that have still not been restored. They have fewer employees than they had 2016, 17 and 2018. David Lutes asked that they make the request. They tell their Principal and staff to make requests but they may not get.

Paul said the budget is a level service budget that is presented there are a number of items that should be in this budget to move the district forward there are a number of things that should be built in but recognize that this is not the time to make that request. They believe it is imperative that we know what is not in the budget these things have been needed for quite some time but not put in because they understand the position the district is in.

Paul spoke about the items that were not in the budget all available in the attachments found on [www.mytowngovernment.org](http://www.mytowngovernment.org). There were a number of issues they feel that is important to fund.

They have a long term plan to bring down the user fees to zero but they have removed that it would cost \$150,000 to reduce those fees to zero. We have the higher user fees in the region. There was \$843,000 in items that they have not requested.

Instruction takes up 62% Insurance 16% they must budget for health insurance and retirement insurance. There will be additional small amounts on technology, transportation and facilities.

Paul said that special education costs have been something of concern for several years and because King Philip did not have the best programs to educate those students the best way to educate some of those individuals they were referred out and they have been working over the last two years they have put together programs to reduce the special education budget has saved \$34% but to keep them in the district there is a cost to that. They are still \$300,000 ahead after hiring the staff to run these programs.

3.49% of increase for the level budget they are submitting this includes the savings they discussed.

Larry said the Middle School boilers have required a significant amount of time fixing and are in the process of getting quotes to replace one of the boilers over the summer.

Health Insurance increase is 5% this year. They have had some employees opt to take the Insurance.

The debt service is the cost of the borrowing for paying for the renovations. They are going down because the interest payments go down.

A \$36.5 million dollar budget is what the school committee has voted.

Brian asked about the Superintendent Union he asked if there would be an overall savings to the Town if there were a Superintendent Union. Larry said that there would be 5,000 students spread over 8 towns and that would result in additional Assistant Superintend there would more middle management to coordinate that. It would be a bit of savings but there would not be a significant savings. There has been more collaborations and cost sharing on this and they are working to continue that even further.

Ed Haddad asked how the replenished the E&D fund how does it get it built up again. Larry said the same way that the Free Cash builds up. Revenues exceed what you originally project and what has been turned back. Ed said that Norfolk does not get a refund back it goes to the E&D account.

Ed asked about the special education program that they brought in house for savings but the cost saves significantly he wondered if that included overhead costs or just salary. Ed asked if it covered things like taxes and other costs related to brining that in house.

Susan Klein said they receive a lot of questions on all of the budgets about Free Cash she is wondering if there is a way to explain that is a savings account that allows you to use it to pay for items that come up during the school year. If a boiler system went out she wanted to understand why we were not asking to replacing that. They are replacing it this summer. Paul said that two boilers were not working of the three but because it was a mild winter they were able to hold off replacing one of those units for a bit longer.

Susan said that student materials and teacher materials were very important. She said that the Advisory Committee received a letter asking not to fund a level budget. She asked why they could not have appropriate text books. Paul said that they were hearing from the towns that that were not able to include that in the budget while trying to recognize that they want to provide a strong educational program but to be mindful of what the towns were requesting. He is hopeful that they may be able to do that at the end of the year.

Susan said that the letter also wanted them to take it to a zero budget. She said that it said not possible to do that because it was asked to not give the step and cola agreements. She was looking for them to provide an explanation. He said they have five different contracts (union) and 28 single contracts and they have all been negotiated and you would have to go back to each union and ask them to give up the cola and step increase. It is not as easy as people think it will be. Susan asked Paul Zinni if the budget is not approved at 3% they are asking for and we ask for nothing that would require them to fire or release staff. They would be looking at \$1.2 million dollar reductions to keep it as it was last year. He does not want to scare anyone on what that would look like. There is very little discretionary money in the budget it is staffing, heat, insurance. Staffing would have to go they would have no choice.

Mike Hough said that last year there was \$200,000 in snow clearing Larry said it was not that high but Mike wondered if the lack of snow this year he wanted to make sure that number was still not in the budget. Paul said the snow removal is around \$20,000. There may be some overtime costs.

Mike asked in terms of Norfolk we are doing some aggressive things to control employee health insurance costs and a 5% increase and 13 new people he is curious what they are doing to improve health insurance savings. Larry said one of the things they rolling out is a high deductible plan the premium is lower the deductible is lower. It comes with a health savings account the money rolls over from year to year and it is portable it can go with the employee. They are looking at some early retirement incentives this is a way to reduce costs this will allow you to replace a retiring person with a new person paying them significantly less.

Ed Haddad said that this is not a presidential debate but since his letter was brought up he does understand that the contractual issues. He said wouldn't it be reasonable to go to the Unions and ask them. Once you let the horse out of the barn what are left after that are layoffs he certainly does not want to see that. Paul said it is a broad statement and he respect Mr. Haddad's positions but you are talking about 5 different units and 28 individual contracts and he thinks we need to respond to the situation as it unfolds. They sit down as an administrative team and look at what would hurt students and staff the least. At that point they would go and discuss it at that point. He feels it would be irresponsible on his end to do that but if we have to work with less than needed. Paul said that when you hear conversations like this people drive by and see the school open and running they would have very thoughtful conversation about how to live within the budget they are given with minimal hurtful.

Kristen said people may ask what you did back in 2008, 2009 and 2010. Did they look at people that are not under contract she is not advocating for that but wondered if it was considered? Paul said that he and Larry were not here during that time and he would need to go back and look at what took place at that time. He said he will do his best to deal with whatever they are faced with dealing with the entire administration team. Paul said everyone has a contract and they have been negotiated with the School Committee it is not sitting with one group or one person.

Mike said it is clear that once they approve the budget the horse has left the barn he is asking Blythe and Kevin when the town misses the revenue projections what is the mechanism if we cannot pay what is needed.

Blythe said she would echo what both Ingrid and Paul have said we are in the middle of the crisis she said that she was on a phone call with the state and they know there will be state aid reductions but the down turn started in 2007 and hit in 2008 but it was not until 2010 that they had a negative increase. Municipal reductions take longer to hit home. She said we need to get out on this issue and we will be in a much better position come fall to determine if we will not be able to meet our obligations and a cola freeze may be what is required to make up a gap or if we will need to go deeper. Blythe said a 1% decrease is about \$200,000 what is the best strategies is to seek concessions but she would advocate that we wait a bit longer and what we need to negotiate for and until we can show them the deficit and what we are facing they are not as motivated to take concessions. Mike said the town of Norfolk is clear

because Blythe is here and we can have those conversations but he said KP is a whole different ballgame and what they are hearing from KP is the budget is there.

Mike asked if there was a mechanism and he said Blythe said there is no mechanism. She said King Philip is more reliant on State Aid than we are. They are their own municipality so it is more challenging for them.

Paul said that he feels it is important to say that he hopes that the people here recognize that he and Larry have come to the table and they are part of the Norfolk team and they have been sitting down with all of the departments of Norfolk to collectively work together. The School Committee approved the budget with no increase and no new programs for students. The assessment to Norfolk is well under 2%. He does not believe that they have been irresponsible and like Blythe he has worked for municipalities for a long time and when that time comes they will work with Norfolk but they need to know what they have to prepare for. They do not know if they will be cut or how much they will be cut. If disaster does happen then they will be at the table with all while protecting the children's education.

Susan Klein said that she was in town when the major cuts took place several years back and she attended the hearings and was very involved with the schools. She said that she has seen both on the Advisory Committee and she has seen a huge improvement since Paul has come aboard. It is different the amount of work put in is higher the budget is better put together. She said that she feels that he is doing an excellent job. Paul said that he would be remiss if he did not mention the team he has behind him.

David asked if the petition was voted on by the Select Board, Susan said that it does not have to be voted

Blythe said she can check with Town Counsel but she believes overall there is no issue with it.

A motion to adjourn was made by Dave Lutes. It was seconded by Kristen Balash and so voted. All were in favor.

Dave Lutes yes, Jackie Katz, yes, Jonathan Hurwitz, abstained, Brian Beachkofski, yes, Susan Klein, Arthur Frontczak, yes, Mike Hough, yes, Kristen Balash, yes.

Susan Jacobson informed the group that all documents would be posted on [www.mytowngovernment.org](http://www.mytowngovernment.org). This is where the committee and the public can get weekly copies of meeting materials.

Meeting adjourned 9:14 PM

Respectfully submitted

David Lutes, Clerk

