

Town of Holliston
Finance Committee
Meeting Minutes
March 17, 2020

The meeting was convened at 7:00 pm and all participation was remote due to the COVID -19 virus per the modifications to the OML allowed under the state of emergency. In attendance in Town Hall room 105 was only Chairperson Ken Szajda. In attendance remotely were Vice –Chair Benjamin Sparrell, Clerk Vincent Murphy, Daniel Alfred, Tim Maxwell, Sue Nersessian, and Michelle Zeamer. All other attendees and participants referenced below attended remotely.

From the School Committee, Ms. Hanstad presented the FY21 proposed school budget. Also in attendance from the School Committee were Ms. Kocian, Mrs. Listewnik, Mr. Morton, and Ms. Neborsky. Also attending: Dr. Jackson (Superintendent), and Mr. Buday (School Business Manager). The FY21 request presented was approved previously by the School Committee.

Operations Budget: The school is looking for a 4.73% increase for next year based on a fixed cost increase of 2.72% and a new initiative increase of 2.01%. This is above the 1% guideline issued by the Finance Committee. The total Operational request is \$36,598,807. The total FY21 Capital request is \$1,018,086, including investment in technology and building infrastructure. The budget was based on the 5-year strategic plan, assuming grant funding continues at FY19 level. The drivers to the fixed costs are as follows:

Salaries (Contractual Obligations): \$1,031,642

Other Fixed Costs: \$95,275

SPED Costs: (\$176, 997)

Total: \$949,920 or 2.72%

FY21 School Initiatives:

Placentino initiatives include a 3-year phase in of tuition free full day kindergarten for a cost of \$208,500 and an increase of .4 FTE for a Speech/Language Pathologist for \$24,571. Miller Initiatives include adding a Math Tutor for 16 hr/wk \$9,878, adding a reading Tutor for 15 hr/wk \$9,261, and adding a full time Permanent Sub for \$22,500. Adams School Initiatives include adding a Student Management Assistant to assist with discipline issues and large student gatherings for \$34,992 and adding a .5 FTE SPED Curriculum Specialist for \$30,704. The High school Initiatives include adding an Admin Assistant to the Athletic Director to assist with ordering equipment, scheduling, policy compliance, and managing parent /coach communication for \$33,600. The second initiative was restoring the SPED Department Leader stipend for \$2,813. The third request was to add a Permanent Sub position for \$22,500. The final initiative was adding a .2 FTE Speech/Language Pathologist for \$16,437.

District Wide Initiatives for Capital include Chrome books for grades K, 6, and 9 per plan (\$126,478), Teacher and Admin Support Device Replacement (\$244,820, both chrome books and desktop equipment), and file servers to support existing programs that cannot be migrated to the cloud (\$21,788).

District Wide Student Service Initiatives include a Mood Check Program for depression screening for \$60,000 and an Out of district Liaison for \$45,000.

Finance and Operations Initiatives include a Maintenance Specialist for \$55,163 and adding a Custodian for \$30,909. High school repairs include widows for cafeteria, library, and Science room, an Auditorium roof top unit, and replacing the turf at Kamitian field for \$500,000. Another initiative was repairing the Miller roof for \$125,000. The final initiative was for a Transportation Support Specialist for \$8,000.

The Curriculum and Instructional Initiatives include a .5 FTE for English Language Learner Program Leadership for \$37,514. Other District wide Initiatives include a 1.0 FTE Director of Human Resources for \$95,000 (this would not include managing benefits).

The School department did provide a prioritization of their requests. Although this request exceeded the 1% guideline, the School Committee noted that it is in line with other community's school systems.

Discussion: There was concern over cost growth and the amounts for the above positions did not include the cost of benefits. The schools will provide the revised amount with benefits. There was also concern over the capital request for devices and why a wholesale replacement for all staff was required. In the future replacements need to be staggered. The Finance Committee also wanted to see the school budget from last year compared to the request for this year, as well as actual expenses compared to budgeted amounts. The schools will follow up with that data.

There was also discussion concerning the COVID 19 economic impact with some Finance Committee members saying that it may not be wise to finalize any contract negotiations until the full impact was understood. The Finance Committee also mentioned that there may be potential to reduce the fuel budget. There was discussion concerning state funding for the Mood Check program, however the schools did not think that was probable. It was emphasized that all efforts should be made to coordinate with the Town Technology Director for any technology purchases as well as coordinating with the town Facility Manager for any facility expenditures. The Finance Committee also requested that the schools provide a listing of current staff and what positions are being added.

Dr. Jackson then presented the Emergency Response Challenges to the COVID 19 virus (only represents a 3 week impact).

1. To provide for continuity of learning, devices need to be provided to some students and all Para professionals, \$21,750.
2. Continuing to pay hourly staff that is normally funded out of allocation accounts (Extended Day and Cafeteria), \$166,040.26.

3. Addressing food service loss and providing a grab and go for families with food insecurity, \$3,825.

The total loss impact is \$91,615.26 (includes donations of chrome books).

The Finance Committee mentioned that continuing to provide compensation for hourly employees not able to work due to the school closure needs to be part of a town-wide decision, not a school only decision.

The Schools asked the device funding be addressed immediately to enable remote learning.

A motion was made by Dan Alfred to agree with the purchase of devices for the continuity of learning during the COVID 19 crisis for \$21,750. Sue Nersessian seconded the motion, the motion carried 7 to 0. This was not a specific allocation of funds, just a statement by the Fincom that they agreed with the funding need by the School Department.

Finance Committee member Dan Alfred made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 9:53pm, motion was seconded by Tim Maxwell. The roll call vote to adjourn the meeting passed 7 to 0.