



Advisory Committee Meeting Minutes
Thursday, February 24, 2022
Zoom Video/Audio Conference – 6:30 pm

Pursuant to Chapter 20 of the Acts of 2021, Scituate Advisory Committee Members held the February 24, 2022 meeting via Zoom Video and/or Audio (Dial-in for those with only phone access). All participants participated remotely.

Committee Members Present: Jamie Gilmore; Chair, Elise Russo, Jerry Kelly, Dan McGuiggin, Missy Seidel, Patrice Metro, Lincoln Heineman and Lynda Ferguson

Committee Members Not in Attendance:
Michael Westort

Also in Attendance: Nancy Holt, Finance Director/Town Accountant; Seth Pfeiffer, SCTV Facilitator; James Boudreau, Town Administrator; Robert Dutch, Director of School Finance and Business; William Burkhead, Superintendent of Schools; Thomas Hickey, Superintendent of South Shore Regional School District (South Shore Vocational Technical High School); Dan Fennelly, Community Preservation Committee Chair; Peter Gates, School Committee Member

Mr. Gilmore called the meeting to order at 6:30 p.m.

Mr. Kelly made a motion to accept the agenda which was seconded by Ms. Russo and voted unanimously in favor (6-0) by roll call vote; Mr. Gilmore-yes, Ms. Russo-yes, Mr. Kelly-yes, Mr. McGuiggin-yes, Ms. Seidel-yes and Ms. Ferguson-yes

Ms. Metro joined the meeting.

Mr. Gilmore called for a motion to accept the minutes of the February 17, 2022 meeting which was made by Mr. Kelly seconded by Mr. McGuiggin. The minutes were voted in favor (5-0-2) by roll call vote; Mr. Gilmore-yes, Ms. Russo-yes, Mr. Kelly-yes, Mr. McGuiggin-yes, Ms. Seidel-abstain, Ms. Metro-abstain and Ms. Ferguson-yes

Review of School Budget

Mr. Burkhead shared his screen for a budget presentation. Mr. Burkhead reviewed the two pillars of the education system in Scituate. He noted a threefold increase in curriculum spending

and elimination of athletic fees which continues the elimination of fees started last year with full-day kindergarten fee. He further noted a focus on collaboration with students, faculty and community members to achieve the goals of the system including additional funding for maintenance. Dr. Dutch noted a 4.44% increase in support from the Town for the School budget. Mr. Burkhead reviewed the School Department's budget process as a ground up process to determine the needs of the district to meet their identified educational goals.

He noted that the prior year budget included 84% for staffing. He stated the proposed budget does not include any additional staffing which reflects the changes in enrollment. He highlighted the district's use of CARES Act funds and ESSER funds especially for improvements to the HVAC systems in the schools. Another initiative with ESSER III funds will be an elementary reading program which has not existed in many years. The district has also had good success in applying for and receiving competitive grants.

Mr. Heineman joined the meeting.

Dr. Dutch stated that 52.5% of the budget goes to regular education, 26.3% to SPED, 2.1% to transportation, 1.1% to technology, 1.8% to athletics, 6.6% for maintenance, 1.5% for early childhood center and 8.1% for administration. Mr. Kelly noted that 14.5% of students were in SPED programs and asked if it was typical compared to our neighboring towns. Dr. Dutch said drivers of those expenses included the number of out of town students as well as the out of districts placements which amounted to \$3M. Mr. Kelly asked for confirmation that this is a legal responsibility which Dr. Dutch confirmed. Mr. Gilmore noted it would be interesting to see a five year history of the district's SPED costs to see the volatility in that area. Dr. Dutch explained that 80.52% of the budget is for salaries, 8.08% for other expenses including out of district placements, 3.74% for facilities and operations and 8.33% for supplies.

Mr. Burkhead reviewed the enrollment trends of 3,278 in 2010, 3,092 in 2015 and 2,977 in 2020. He showed the neighboring towns of Cohasset, Duxbury, Hanover, Hingham, Marshfield and Norwell which all had declining enrollments in varying degrees. Dr. Dutch compared per pupil expenditures for the same districts as well as FTE teachers per 100 students, teacher retention and average salary. Mr. Kelly asked if due to the pandemic was there an expectation of more retirements and a corresponding decrease in the average teacher's salary. Dr. Dutch replied in the affirmative to both questions. Ms. Metro asked when teachers achieve the top level of the pay scale and Dr. Dutch replied that it depends on education attainment and length of service. Dr. Dutch said there were 175 teachers at top step and most reached their maximum retirement benefit at age 58.

Dr. Dutch reviewed the district's disabilities population which included 26% for learning disabilities, 17% for delayed development and 16% for health reasons. He further noted that 366 students with disabilities remained in the district of which 301 were fully inclusive, 22 were partially inclusive, 39 were substantially separate and 4 were in a separate school in the district. Mr. Kelly asked how many students were out of district placements and Mr. Burkhead said it was 38. Dr. Dutch the various cost centers of the budget and changes in allocations and classifications made for better reporting and transparency. He noted they received a \$300,000 grant to purchase Chromebooks so the district can move to a one to one program. Mr. Burkhead

said they have a five year plan for replacement and it also enables them to put security software on all computers uniformly to protect students.

Dr. Dutch noted an increase in the school nurse line to buy licenses for a program called SNAP to track student data rather than a manual process. He noted the increases in Athletics including the cost of ice time due to a change in ownership of the rinks. Ms. Ferguson noted a \$150,000 increase in the athletic costs compounded with a reduction of \$220,000 in athletic fees. Dr. Dutch stated it is covered in the additional revenue reflected in the 4.4%. Ms. Ferguson noted that there is a substantial amount of fundraising that takes place and would that have to be increased in order to maintain the elimination of fees. Dr. Dutch replied in the negative stating that the fundraising provides the non-budgeted items. Ms. Ferguson noted that the parents would not need to fundraise if the fees remained and were used for the program. Mr. Burkhead replied that he did not foresee a shift of the cost onto parents. Ms. Ferguson asked if the fees for other activities such as drama were eliminated and Dr. Dutch responded that there were no fees for those activities.

Dr. Dutch noted the school bus leases needed to be re-bid in FY23. Mr. Burkhead stated that the transportation fee had not been eliminated because of the difficulty to get drivers. He noted that if ridership increases, there may be a need for more busses and drivers. The total FY23 budget is \$46,349,851.75 which is supported by \$43,106,872 and \$250,000 from the town appropriation and the balance coming from grants, circuit breaker, non-resident tuition, gate receipts, transportation fees and early childhood center receipts. Ms. Ferguson asked who pays the non-resident tuition and Dr. Dutch stated the sending school district pays. Ms. Ferguson asked if that fee covered the costs and Dr. Dutch said the School Committee was considering raising the amount to better reflect the actual costs.

Mr. Gilmore asked what percentage of the last year's graduating class went onto college and onto trade schools. Mr. Burkhead said he could obtain that information and forward it at a later date.

Review of South Shore Regional School District Assessment

Superintendent Hickey reviewed the district's budget process with a final budget approved in February. The FY23 budget is 1.8% increase over the prior year. The assessment for Scituate of is \$18,324 less than the prior year due to level enrollment of 30 students, the minimum contribution from the state increased slightly but it was offset by a decrease in the capital requests. Scituate's share of capital reduced from \$62,000 to \$13,000 which is controlled by the regional agreement which is based on student enrollment.

He happily reported that the district was accepted into the MSBA core program. The district has been applying to the program since 2015. The goal is to get a slightly larger and modernized school to service the needs of their students. He also reported that the Town of Marshfield had expressed interest in joining the district which would be beneficial with MSBA as an expanding the region.

Ms. Ferguson left the meeting.

Mr. Gilmore asked the number of students enrolled in the prior year. Mr. Hickey responded it was 30. He stated there are four graduating seniors from Scituate in this class but 21 Scituate students have been accepted for the ninth grade. Ms. Seidel asked about Marshfield's interest in joining as a member of the district. Mr. Hickey stated that Marshfield's School Committee and Select Board voted to create a regional school planning committee and they are coming for a tour in early March. The culmination would be an amended regional agreement which would go to existing eight member communities for a vote and it is at least a year out. There is new legislation would not allow out of district exploratory students to enter if there is in-district demand.

Review of Community Preservation Committee Recommendations

Mr. Fennelly shared his screen and noted the total state matching funds amounted to \$9,577,519 since 2004 and that it has been increasing in recent years and he hopes that will continue. He reviewed the estimated receipts for FY23 of \$2,514,166 which would result in 10% set-asides of \$251,417 for community housing, historic resources and open space and a minimum administrative expense of 2.5% which amounts to \$62,854. He also noted that due to the increased state funding in FY22, an additional amount needs to be set-aside for Historic Resources and Community Housing to meeting the 10% requirement for FY22.

Mr. Fennelly reviewed the FY23 proposals of for this cycle in summary of the \$5.2M in available funds. He also noted five project rescissions amounting to \$123,130.04 for projects that have been completed or did not move forward. There are three applications that were submitted but not ready for the annual town meeting including the 90 foot baseball field construction, the restoration of the Cushing/Cedarwood Trail and restoration of the Cole Parkway Bandstand.

Historic Survey Funding - \$5,000: Mr. Fennelly noted this would provide an additional \$5,000 to the 2018 project grant of \$10,000 to use as a 50% match for a grant.

Scituate Lighthouse Restoration - \$2,000,000: Mr. Fennelly noted there is serious deterioration of the railings and the lantern room. Additional interior repairs would be made as well as a rebuild of the lantern room. The last renovation was done in 1977 and the latest major renovation was done in the 1930s. It is the 11th oldest lighthouse in the United States built in 1811 and an iconic structure of Scituate. The estimated cost is \$800,000-\$1,500,000 plus a professional project manager with experience in historical lighthouse renovations. The materials include copper and mahogany which are expected to increase in cost.

Ms. Metro asked if being on the National Register for Historic Resources require the maintenance of the facility. Mr. Fennelly stated he did not know. He did inform members that the Historic Society was looking for grants as well.

Hollett Street Land Acquisition - \$41,000: Mr. Fennelly stated this is 2.3 acres of mostly upland property abutting the Purple Dinosaur Park which would allow the recreation area to be expanded. The property was appraised at \$41,000 and that is the offer for purchase. The parcel identification is Lot 20-4-38-A. A purchase and sale agreement has already been signed contingent on town meeting approval. Mr. Heineman asked if it was wet and Mr. Fennelly said

it appeared to be 80% upland and goes down to the railroad tracks.

Town Archives - \$1,200: Mr. Fennelly stated this project was to digitize the 16 binders of documents pertaining to the WPA projects.

Tennis Court Study - \$13,560: Mr. Fennelly stated this project was to conduct a feasibility study for the upgrade and expansion of the existing tennis courts at the high school. Ms. Metro asked the expected construction cost for the project and Mr. Fennelly responded that he did not know and it depended on the outcome of the study.

Small Dog Park - \$29,833: Mr. Fennelly explained this would complete the dog park project started in 2018. The original request was for a small and large dog park and in 2018 the parking lot for both parks was done as was the construction of the large dog park. Ms. Russo asked the placement of the dog park in relation to the existing one. Mr. Fennelly noted it is behind the parking lot on land owned by the Town. The Stanton Foundation is providing 50% of the funding for the park and the Friends of the Scituate Dog Park will provide \$5,000. Mr. Kelly said it is ½ acre under the wind turbine.

Mordecai Lincoln Land Acquisition - \$400,000: Mr. Fennelly stated that \$900,000 was approved in 2019 for the purchase of the property. The 2019 appraisal was twice the approved purchase price. In the interim, the sellers returned and asked for an additional \$400,000 due to the escalating real estate market prices. The seller must sign a purchase and sale prior to town meeting, any Title V issues are addressed and an acceptable inspection of the property is completed. Mr. Fennelly said since there was no purchase and sale agreement in place, they had no recourse when the sellers returned. In future, the CPC will get a signed purchase and sale in advance of town meeting. Ms. Seidel asked if there are any other properties that have not closed. Mr. Fennelly stated that the Sunrise property has not closed but there is a signed purchase and sale agreement.

Other Business

Mr. Gilmore noted Mr. Kelly's letter to the Plymouth County Retirement Association was completed. Ms. Metro asked if the members had decided to send a letter. Mr. Kelly said it was just a thank you letter. Ms. Metro asked about the mechanism to suggest changes in compliance with Open Meeting Law. Mr. Boudreau said unless it was grammatical it needed to be in open session. Ms. Metro suggested a change in language in the thank you letter to keep it on a positive note. Mr. Gilmore disagreed with the change. Ms. Russo asked if this letter was outside their purview to be sending on behalf of the Town of Scituate and was it on behalf of the Town of Scituate or just the Advisory Committee. Mr. Gilmore said this was within their purview as part of the review of the budget. Ms. Metro and Ms. Russo disagreed stating the Advisory Committee invited them to appear before them. Ms. Metro stated the Advisory Committee is not reviewing any other contracts. Mr. Kelly asked to take a vote at the next meeting as to whether to send the letter. Ms. Seidel asked if the Select Board should be copied on the thank you letter.

Ms. Metro asked about the deadline for write-ups and Mr. Gilmore responded March 15th except for some items such as the zoning articles.

Ms. Ferguson re-joined the meeting.

Mr. Kelly made a motion to adjourn the meeting which was seconded by Mr. McGuiggin at 9:31 p.m.; the Committee voted unanimously in favor (8-0) by roll call vote; Mr. Gilmore-yes, Ms. Russo-yes, Mr. Kelly-yes, Ms. Ferguson-yes, Mr. McGuiggin-yes, Mr. Westort-yes, and Mr. Heineman-yes.

Respectfully Submitted,

Nancy Holt
Recorder