

GREENFIELD PUBLIC SCHOOLS
SPECIAL MEETING of the SCHOOL COMMITTEE
MINUTES: Monday, February 25, 2019
John Zon Community Center, 35 Pleasant Street, Greenfield MA
Approved 03.13.19

Present: Don Alexander (DA); Katie Caron (KC); Susan Eckstrom (SE); Jordana Harper, Superintendent (JH); Susan Hollins (SH) *attending remotely*; William Martin (WM); Adrienne Nunez (AN)

Absent: Cameron Ward (CW)

Also present: Kia Burton-King, parent; Bob Cooley, resident; Melodie Goodwin, Principal, Newton School; Stephen Nembirkow, GPS Business Manager; Nancy Putnam, Principal, Federal Street; Jake Toomey, Principal, Four Corners; Mary Traver, SEPAC; Ed Voudren, GPS Transportation Coordinator; Mckenzie Webb, parent; Crystal Zimmer, SEPAC; other school staff and citizens.

I. Call to Order

With a quorum present (DA, KC, SE, SH, WM, AN), Chair Nunez opened the meeting at 6:33 p.m.

II. Public Comment

Bob Cooley, resident, spoke in favor of student services, especially for those who've experienced adverse childhood experiences; encouraged Subcommittees to work well together.

Mary Traver, Special Education Parent Advisory Council Co-Chair, urged funding for cameras on GPS buses.

Crystal Zimmer, Special Education Parent Advisory Council Secretary, spoke in support of increased professional behavioral staff (BCBAs); adequate number of and training for paras; using increased state funds directly for schools.

Kia Burton-King, parent, spoke against elimination of two bus routes, and asked about plans for Green River School next year, including re-opening as elementary school to ease space concerns at other elementary schools.

Mckenzie Webb, parent, shared concerns about children's safety walking to school if bus routes are eliminated, and overcrowding at elementary schools.

III. Business

A. Referral to Health & Safety Subcommittee: Emergency Shelter at School Buildings

KC moved to refer emergency shelter at school buildings to the Health & Safety Subcommittee. DA 2nd. Motion passed unanimously.

B. Storm update

Supt. provided an update on electricity outages at Newton, GMS due to strong winds. Newton students briefly evacuated at recommendation of fire dept.; furnace being worked on. GMS power restored. Single-school closures are possible if outages continue.

C. Public Hearing on FY20 Budget and Budget Presentation

Superintendent presented budget, with goal of preserving FY19 level of services for FY20. Requires funding increase as costs increase: staff salaries/benefits, transportation, out of district placements. Difficult decisions – e.g., 20+ new positions requests, only a few included in budget.

- Enrollment – *GPS is growing. Expect 50 more students in Fall 2019: 1,795 students*
- Per Pupil Spending – comparison with nearby districts. *FY17 is most recent certified data available.*
- Choice-In – *103 choice-in students this year, bringing \$ with them. Choice-in seats offered only if room. School Committee approves and caps number of choice-in seats each year. Typically, all choice seats are filled with a waiting list.*
- Chapter 70 increase of \$1.1million. *Significant increase, not seen in previous years.*
- Budget process (timetable) - *Development of budget has been going on for a long time. Open opportunity for comments.*
- FY20 Operating Cost Increases – *3 main areas: Salaries (80+%); transportation; special education*
- FY20 Staff Needs – *6 new positions – 3 in special education, required; 3 to open Green River program. Another site possible (GHS) if Green River building not ready.*
- FY20 Increases – *\$351K for substitute teachers; contract salary adjustments; transportation; out of district tuition. Other needs not presented: many requests by building principals not included in budget.*
- Reductions to Budget – *Eliminate 4 instructional aides (IAs); eliminate before-school care; eliminate 2 bus routes; in-house busing*
- Teacher Salaries and Class Size
- Economically Disadvantaged and High Need Students
- What is not in this budget
 - Four Corners 4th grade teacher provided by eliminating one K class.
 - Step increases; application to City to cover

Draft budget (35 pages) available on website, publicly available.

Steve Nembirkow, GPS Business Office reviewed FY20 Budget Points

- Per pupil spending is low, compared to region
- Average teacher salary is low; average class size is high
- High % of students with disabilities and high needs
- Funding above minimum
- Greenfield identified for Focused/Targeted Support
- Revolving funds
- Increases and decreases in FY20 budget
- Choice-In, Choice-Out

Discussion:

- GREAT School (Green River) would share nurse coverage
- Small, gradual annual increase of % students with disabilities. Increase of English Language Learners has been large, rapid.
- Busing
 - 2 bus routes to be cut, 1.5 miles and under: Oak Courts, Greenfield Gardens
 - Voudren does not support; safety, liability concerns, requires additional \$ for crossing guards
 - Effect on students' attendance, late arrivals
 - Intra-district school choice: parents responsible for transportation

- \$70K for transportation includes purchasing van/bus for short routes. Assessment underway.
- Public bus transport (FRTA) for GHS?
- Bus cameras
 - need for non-verbal students, in case of injury, accident
 - funds not in FY20 budget. Use special ed revolving fund? Supt. seeking alternative \$
- Lower average teacher's salary reflects higher % of newer teachers
- Before-School Care
 - Currently provided at all 3 elementary schools; to be eliminated FY20
 - Costs = paying IAs for before-school hours beyond their regular workday
 - 50-60 students
 - School alternatives possible, e.g., partnering with Rec Dept.
 - Y and other early-bird programs available in town
 - Convenience for some families; necessity (safety, supervision) for others
- Class size numbers are from DESE; normative comparison across districts, not actual class size
- Effect of choice-in, choice-out: to be discussed when School Cte votes choice-in numbers
- Circuit breaker: \$960K estimated revenue for FY19, \$903K to be spent this year
- WM, Nembirkow to meet to reconcile beginning balances
- Chapter 70 \$1.1million increase – WM: City will claim some for City-paid benefits
- 4 instructional aid positions cut; currently vacant
- Green River School: ADA compliant, flooring asbestos-free. Discrepancy in timing when GPS needs City to install heat (June) vs when Mayor expects (August or later)
- Account for \$ savings through energy efficiency

AN moved to request that town hall, in coordination with our business department, provide us with estimates for increases to these estimated costs, insurance expenses and any other relevant expenses that the city will be paying for that we do not have numbers on, specifically increases from this year to next year. KC 2nd.

Medicare, health insurance, retirement pension; central maintenance, DPW, energy
Health insurance % amount of increase not available until late May

Supt. receives annual aggregate report; itemized breakdown would be more useful

Roll call vote: Yes: WM, DA, KC, AN, SE. Abstain: SH. Motion passed 5-0-1.

Budget discussion continued:

- Support for increasing substitute teacher pay; lack of subs “major problem”
- Concern that technology (hardware, software) not in budget
- Level services budget = \$19,161,000 = \$600K increase over FY19 (contractual obligations, balancing offsets). What is impact to average taxpayer?
- All-funds cost – Nembirkow to prepare for next discussion

AN moved that at March 7 meeting we have a side by side comparison [FY19/FY20] overview of the all-funds budget for this year as well as what is being drafted for next year including an estimate as to what increases would incur to local taxpayers to fund next year's budget. SE 2nd. Roll call: YES – WM, DA, KC, AN, SE, SH. Motion passed unanimously.

Budget discussion continued:

- "Find efficiencies" – JH: no ways left to reduce budget without affecting students
- Request to resolve \$100K state pothole award from 2013
- Balances in revolving accounts required by policy
- Strong AP program; who pays AP exam costs?

Public comment

Mary Traver: "more than happy to see a reasonable increase [in taxes] to fund the school budget"

Crystal Zimmer: Concern that city will over-use Chapter 70 \$, prefers it go to classrooms; concern that cuts affect the most needy students.

Public hearing closed.

IV. Executive Session

AN announced intent to move into Executive Session in accordance with MGL c 30A, §21, (3) & (10): To discuss strategy with respect to collective bargaining or litigation if an open meeting may have a detrimental effect on the bargaining or litigating position of the public body and the chair so declares (Unit A); and to discuss trade secrets of confidential, competitively sensitive or other proprietary information prepared.

KC moved to enter Executive Session. SE 2nd. Roll call vote: Yes – WM, DA, KC, AN, SE, SH. Moved into executive session at 9:21 p.m.

KC moved to leave Executive Session. DA 2nd. Roll call vote: Yes – WM, DA, KC, SH, AN. Returned to public session at 9:57 p.m.

V. Transportation contract

DA moved to support the Kuzmeskus bid, pending contract approval, for a 5-year term. WM 2nd. Roll call: YES, WM, DA, AN, SH. Motion passed unanimously.

IX. Adjournment

AN moved to adjourn. KC 2nd. Motion passed unanimously. Meeting adjourned at 10:00 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Susan Farber
Recording Secretary

Meeting Documents

1. FY20 Budget Point from the GPS Business Office
2. Superintendent's FY20 Budget