

TOWN OF SOUTH WINDSOR

MINUTES

**TOWN COUNCIL/BOARD OF EDUCATION
ROOM ALT. 6
TIMOTHY EDWARDS MIDDLE SCHOOL**

JOINT BUDGET WORK SESSION

DATE: MARCH 23, 2016

TIME: 6:00 P.M.

1. Call Meeting to Order

Mayor Delnicki called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m.

2. Roll Call

Town Council

Members Present: Mayor Thomas Delnicki
Deputy Mayor Carolyn Mirek
Councilor M. Saud Anwar
Councilor William Carroll (arrived at 7:17 p.m.)
Councilor Lisa Maneeley (arrived at 6:46 p.m.)
Councilor Liz Pendleton
Councilor Matthew Riley
Councilor Janice Snyder

Members Absent: Councilor Edward Havens

Board of Education

Members Present: Chairperson David Joy
Vice Chairperson Beth Esstman
Joseph Durette
Michael Gonzelez
Mary Justine Hockenberry
Philip Koboski
Richard Stahr
Craig Zimmerman

Members Absent: Jamie Gamble

Also Present: Superintendent of Schools Dr. Kate Carter
Asst. Superintendent Colin McNamara
Chris Chermerka, Business Manager

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3. Public Participation

Mr. Robert Dickinson, 19 Birch Road came forward to speak in favor of adding another period to the high school curriculum. This will enable children to have their extra curriculum activities without interrupting their basic classes. Mr. Dickinson stated he would like to see the budget approved to support this.

4. Items for Discussion

A. Board of Education Proposed Budget for Fiscal Year 2016/2017

Chairman Joy welcomed the Council to the Board of Education meeting room. Chairman Joy explained that this year's budget request is for a \$1.4 million dollar increase which is a 1.98% increase over the current budget. The new budget would be for a total of \$71,752,070 if approved. It represents a net FTE increase of 5.6 FTE's. This is a budget that was proposed to the Board of Education by Superintendent Kate Carter and was unanimously supported by the Board of Education members. Staff services is an off-set this year and will see a decrease this year in staff services of more than \$400,000 due to the agreement from the teachers union to accept a high deductible health care plan. The drivers of the budget increases include salary increases, transportation contract, staffing at the high school of five teachers to provide elective opportunities to support the new graduation requirement and career pathway opportunities, a new elementary school teacher to serve in pilot at Philip R Smith Elementary School for STEM, one to one computing devices for all 9th and 10th grade students at the High School, and a new school psychologist to help address social and emotion needs of students.

Answering questions from Council members, Dr. Carter explained that declining enrollment is something that is happening across the State. This impacts communities at different times. The only way to achieve a reduction in expenses due to declining enrollment would be if you had a certain amount of students decline in the same school and in the same grade. If that did happen, then you would be able to reduce teaching staff. The Board of Education has decreased in the K-5 staffing in the Special Education area due to lower case loads. Dr. Carter informed the Council that the 5.6 FTE's are associated with the proposed 8 period day at the High School. Staffing is necessary to accommodate students with opportunities. Dr. Carter then gave

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4. A. (Continued)

a breakdown of the 5.6 FTE positions. A STEM pilot program will be offered in Philip R. Smith Elementary School. If the proposed STEM pilot program is successful, eventually the program will be in each elementary school.

In order to do this, a STEM teacher will need to be hired. Dr. Carter explained to the Council and public the benefits associated with the STEM program.

South Windsor's current enrollment in the Open Choice is 132 students and the \$837,000 in the budget represents the per pupil allocation paid for through the State grant. Dr. Carter explained that the Nexus billing is if a child who lives in Vernon is placed in a home in South Windsor through DCF. South Windsor has the right to bill Vernon for costs. South Windsor's outplacement costs are not associated with another school district that has an expertise or concentration in one area; it is typically a special education organization that is providing a particular service that can not be found in a traditional school setting. There are times that it is in the best interest of the child to be out placed. Those costs are a significant part of the Special Education budget.

Dr. Carter explained that when South Windsor makes proposals for opening up new seats for children outside of the South Windsor district, the enrollment is first reviewed as well as the programming to determine where there are openings. It is checked to make sure that adding students to a particular school does not create the need for additional staff.

Councilor Mirek stated that she is in favor of the 8 period day at the High School. This will allow students more opportunities. Dr. Carter added that the increase in the graduation requirements is a major factor in needing an 8 period day. South Windsor is the only school in its DRG that is not offering an 8 period day.

Currently there is a School Psychologist in the Middle School and a School Psychologist in the High School. The request for an additional School Psychologist will help with the increased demands both at the Middle School and High School. Councilor Mirek stated she feels this is a critical position and would support it.

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Discussing the one to one computing devices for 9th and 10th grade students, Dr. Carter stated that the devices have been designed to be as durable as possible. By providing students with the same level of technology support, the school system is addressing an equity issue and allowing for more consistent delivery of instruction with the teacher. The teachers will know and understand the devices the students are using which may not happen if the students brought their own devices from home. Having the devices will also allow for the concept of a flipped classroom to be used. Traditionally, the classroom is a place for lectures and practice of what is learned from the lecture is done at home. This concept will allow children to listen to a lecture at home and practice what is being learned from the lecture in the classroom. In last year's budget it was proposed to only have the one to one computing devices for 9th grade students, but for financial reasons it did not happen. This year it is being proposed to roll out devices to 9th and 10th grade students which will put the Board of Education back on track where they had hoped to be if the proposal last year had been approved. The goal is to eventually have all grades using these devices. Dr. Carter then discussed the advantages of the one to one computing devices and liability issues.

Councilor Riley stated he is very excited to see the proposal of an 8 period day in the budget. Councilor Riley requested that Dr. Carter discuss the Board's policy on maximum class sizes for K-3 and grades 4-5. Dr. Carter explained that the policy for maximum class size in K-3 is no larger than 24. The maximum class size in grades 4-5 is no larger than 26 students. Those guidelines tell the school administration when it will be necessary to add another class room and teacher. In mid-year and/or August changes either up or down will happen in order to comply with policies and have the appropriate level of staffing.

Dr. Carter stated that she would look into the actual grade 9 enrollment versus the projected grade 10 enrollment because there is a significant decline.

Councilor Pendleton pointed out that half of South Windsor's population is 55 and over and they will not be getting an increase this year.

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4. A. (Continued)

A discussion took place regarding the cost to educate a student in South Windsor. The per pupil cost is approximately \$16,000. The Open Choice program consists of 132 students. The Board of Education is reimbursed \$6,000 per student. Dr. Carter explained that South Windsor is maintaining the same level of support as last year. To change the cost to educate the children of South Windsor, the Board of Education will look at the following services to try to change the per pupil cost – Special Education, health care benefits, and food services.

Answering further questions from Council members, Dr. Carter explained that included in the proposal of 5.6 FTE's, there is a decrease of 1.5 Special Education teachers. In last years budget there was a \$1.3 million dollar reduction from what the Board of Education proposed. The Board of Education is requesting two part time positions for security staff at the Middle School.

Ms. Chemerka informed the Council that it is projected at this time for the Board of Education to receive 80% reimbursement for Special Education from the State but this is not confirmed until May. The Board of Education received 80.17% last year. Dr. Carter stated that the Board of Education is also projecting that there will be a surplus in Special Education.

Mayor Delnicki questioned what the ideal date would be to consider acting on the Board of Education budget? Dr. Carter requested that the Town Council act on the Board of Education budget at their next available opportunity. This would help with class schedules at the High School as well as with the hiring of teachers if necessary.

Dr. Carter explained that currently South Windsor has one student participating in the Vocational Agricultural program at Rockville High School because South Windsor does not offer this program. There is not a reduction in the Music program at Timothy Edwards Middle School. A teacher left who was replaced with another teacher at a lower rate. There is currently a committee formed that will be reviewing a World Language program in K-5. Dr. Carter told the Council that the homeless transportation line item is

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4. A. (Continued)

associated with the situation if a student and their family are displaced at a hotel in Manchester because something happened to their home, such as a fire, South Windsor is required to provide transportation to that student.

At 8:00 p.m. Mayor Delnicki recessed the Work Session in order to call the Public Hearing to order. The Work Session reconvened at 8:03 p.m.

Answering questions, Dr. Carter explained that the average budget request in the State of Connecticut is 2 ½%. Dr. Carter went on to explain that school staff felt strongly about the need to focus on an 8 period day and a one to one computer devices for 9th and 10th grade students rather than to increase security at the High School, which may be a request in a future budget.

Dr. Carter stated that most of what the Board of Education does are requirements to educate children, particularly around special education which is where you will see a lot of unfunded mandates. There is very little in the budget that would be described as discretionary. There is no actual number that can be given in regards to unfunded mandates.

Chairman Joy stated that the greatest unfunded mandate from the Federal Government is their lack of support for special education. Next year South Windsor plans on spending almost \$12 million dollars on special education and the Federal Government's unfunded portion of that, because they have never met the commitment that they offered when they passed the legislation, would be millions and millions of dollars. Then the State can also be looked at for their lack of support.

Councilor Carroll stated the Board of Education and Dr. Carter have done a good job on this budget and he would fully support it. Councilor Carroll also felt that the Town Council should consider approval of this budget.

Ms. Hockenberry said she is happy that the Council members and the Board of Education members could work cooperatively on this budget.

Chairman Joy thanked the Council for meeting with the Board of Education to discuss the Board of Education's budget. It would be very beneficial and appreciated for the Board of Education to have a decision on the budget as the earliest opportunity.

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5. Executive Session

None

6. Adjournment

Councilor Pendleton made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 8:22 p.m. Deputy Mayor Mirek seconded the motion; and it was approved, unanimously.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Deborah W. Reid", is written over a horizontal line.

Deborah W. Reid
Clerk of the Council