

MINUTES – WAYLAND SCHOOL COMMITTEE

Regular Meeting – December 13, 2023

A Regular Meeting of the Wayland School Committee was held on Wednesday, December 13, 2023, at 6:00 P.M. at the Wayland Town Building

Present:

Erin Gibbons, Chair
Jeanne Downs, Vice Chair
Ellen Grieco
Erin Mueller
Christina Rodrigo

Also present:

David Fleishman
Acting Superintendent

Betsy Gavron
Interim Assistant Superintendent

Susan Bottan
Director of Finance & Operations

Debbie Dixson
Interim Director of Student Services

Also:

Allyson Mizoguchi, WHS Principal
Finance Committee: Pam Roman, Kelly Lappin Brian O’Herlihy, Jonathan Barnett, Michael Hoyle
Ellen Tohn, Wayland Energy & Climate Committee
Miriam Gayed & Kaileigh Walker – WHS Green Team
Michael Delman & Sabine Von-Mering – Energize Wayland

1. Welcome & Call to Order:

Chair Erin Gibbons called the meeting to order at 6:03 p.m. and announced that the meeting was being recorded by WayCAM.

Christina Rodrigo thanked the PTO’s for organizing the holiday drives, noting that the elementary schools partner with the Department of Children & Families in Framingham to provide holiday gifts for children in the community. The Middle School supported children from Wayside Youth & Family Support Network.

Erin Mueller highlighted the Eliza J. Norton Foundation community event that she attended. Eliza was a member of the Wayland community who spreads a beautiful message of love and kindness throughout the community despite all the sadness in the world.

2. Public Comment:

Before public comment, Erin Gibbons reminded the public of the Public Comments Policy, particularly item #6; she read.

Pam Wyman, 160 West Plain Street, commented on the previous evening’s meeting at the Middle School and made some suggestions about the decision-making process moving forward. In her opinion, one group of stakeholders making decisions for so many seems to her as inappropriate and a bit unethical. Everyone values the teachers and their opinions, but it is not the only opinion that matters, especially in this case. Ms. Wyman would like the School Council, the School Committee and, in some cases, the parents and students involved in the decision-making process. Many are still waiting for the data, particularly about a percentage of how many teachers are not supporting the trips. In addition, long-term decisions made by short-term/interim administrators as well as not being collaborative was short-sighted; thus, she recommended changing the approach to make the best decisions.

Michael Henrich, 192 West Plain Street, mentioned all of the recent anti-semitic acts/symbols in Wayland. He accused the district of doubling down as if “hands were tied” but noting that the Wayland Public Schools can do the right thing. Since the School Committee is committed to the education of the Wayland students, Mr. Henrich noted that an act of hate can be used as a teachable moment, but he says that the choice has been made to let Jew hatred stand. He was a journalist

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for 15 years and respects the free press as well as developing future journalists. In his opinion, the WSPN opinion essay does not belong on a school-supported website. He elaborated and quoted Massachusetts law and Supreme Court decisions in this regard. Mr. Heinrich requested that the opinion essay be taken down as he believes it platforms hate.

Anna Visi, 23 Wallace Road, expressed her shock and sadness at the Anti-Israel article on the WSPN website, which she believes what are falsehoods in the article and could insight further hate and antisemitism in the community. She added that responses to and treatment of certain groups are inconsistent, such as censoring some groups but not others. Another example is the inconsistency in allowing some signs to be hung at the High School. Ms. Visi believes that by not addressing antisemitism in the community, a message is being sent that the rights and safety of the Jewish students and community members are not important. She asked that everyone work together to unite the community and to ban hate speech regardless of the minority in question.

Jackie Adelson, 5 Saddlebrook Lane, addressed the recent events at the High School that have affected the greater Wayland Public Schools community and greater community, adding that the community needs to come together as unified rather than being divided with different views. She believes this a repeat of history and many in the Jewish community feel unheard and unsafe; thus, they are more vocal asking for more education, more understanding and more support. Ms. Adelson also believes there is a double standard related to statements coming from some staff in the WPS. She referred to the WSPN opinion piece adding that it spread misinformation and caused irreparable harm to the Jewish students. Ms. Adelson presented some actionable steps as they relate to the WSPN article and policies in an effort to cultivate an atmosphere of respect, understanding and unity within the school community.

Sanjin Hodzic, 19 Woodland Road, is a Muslim community member and he does not support violence of any kind. He commented that what is happening all over the world is echoing and reflecting here as well. He cannot condemn someone for being oppressed for 75 years and then push back on the oppression, while at the same time trying to have a normal life which is not normal, and agreeing that history is repeating itself; he explained. He added that propaganda is being spread by many different sources, such as the Internet and many broadcasts. Closer to home, Wayland celebrates several religious holidays but none celebrate the Muslim and Hindu religion/population. Finally, he urged the School Committee to listen to its residents.

3. Acting Superintendent Update:

3.1 *Wayland Student Press Network Update with WHS Principal Allyson Mizoguchi:*

David Fleishman began the discussion, as he has thought about the role of the schools while being faced with the recent polarizing issues during this unprecedented time. Recently, a group of superintendents met and talked about this at length. Leaders face incredible challenges when it comes to communicating about difficult issues around the world as well as the district's role in working with students. David did communicate to the public after October 7, but it is difficult to know what the right amount of communication is necessary. Not sure what the right answer is, David noted that he will communicate on local incidents and events because they impact the community, but everyone wants to do the right thing and to learn and figure it out together.

In terms of working with students, he highlighted that colleges/universities struggle with these difficult issues in that they don't believe the First Amendment is applied equally. He is hopeful that students can address hard issues in several ways both inside and outside of classrooms. This is necessary so they can be prepared for college. He added that we want the students to share their very strong opinions, as well as being reflective and engaging with civil discourse; however, this is very challenging for the adults in achieving these results. Erin Gibbons added that it is important to recognize the School Committee's true mission statement which she read.

Dr. Mizoguchi acknowledged that this has been one of the most challenging moments that she has experienced during her career, as well as recognizing that some students, families, and colleagues are all hurting. At the same time, she has never been prouder to be a leader in the Wayland Public Schools. Dr. Mizoguchi is very clear where she stands on student voices and cultivating within the school community, and she stated with confidence that there is an opportunity to listen to the students' voices and allow them to freely express themselves, even if their words are hurtful to some. Not only does WSPN provide a student-run and open forum for students and has for the past 16 years, but the High School as a whole tries to allow free association and open expression, although difficult, in many different places within the school community in and out of the classrooms. WSPN, a newsroom, is also the medium for a popular and strong journalism program and has received numerous awards over the years. Two teachers provide the structures for free expression and learning, as well as acting as advisers.

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The life cycle of an article begins with an idea that is timely, relevant, and important to the community. The idea is taken through a process over time with many involved, much like a television newsroom, and is then approved by the student co-editors-in-chief. There is a difference between a news piece and an opinion piece in terms of the source, the audience, and the ideas; Dr. Mizoguchi explained.

A discussion ensued and further questions were asked by School Committee members about the ongoing process after a piece is published, the decisions that lead up to whether an article should or should not be published, and possible sources of facts.

The Finance Committee arrived at 6:48 p.m.

3.2 *Special Matter – FY25 Budget Presentation & Discussion of the FY25 Budget:*

David Fleishman presented the FY25 proposed budget that represents a statement of the district's values, priorities, and goals, such as academic achievement, belonging and equity, social-emotional learning and wellness, Student Services, community/communication, and operations to improve existing buildings. The context for budget development per the School Committee budget guidance is "to fully support the academic and social/emotional growth of our students, while respecting the fiscal restraints facing Wayland residents and needs of other Town departments." When building the budget, five areas are considered: program breadth, the educational infrastructure, class sizes, Student Services, and facilities operations; David described.

David described the collaborative approach and process in building the FY25 level service budget that included consulting with school and district leaders to identify needs and priorities, computing costs to comply with contractual obligations and legal mandates, maximizing resources by restructuring, shifting and reducing central office positions in an effort to invest in student services leadership support, and managing risk by budget for all known out-of-district expenses along with building the Special Education Reserve Fund. The process also included working with the Town and aligning it with the Town Manager's FY25 Budget Guidelines and School Committee Budget Guidance.

The Town Manager's guideline was to submit a level service budget for FY25. However, beyond level service, David proposed funding for Full Day Kindergarten (\$400,000) fully funded by Chapter 70 state aid increase and additional staffing due to enrollment, particularly to service students in special education (\$120,000). In addition, there will be a continuation for annual appropriation to the Special Education Reserve Fund (\$150,000), as special education is the most difficult to budget around tuition and transportation. Other priorities include increasing support for diversity, equity, and belonging and bringing the Director's position to a .70 FTE from a .50 FTE, expanding the Spanish Immersion Program to the sixth grade, and the ongoing implementation of Bridges Math and Empowering Writers.

Other priorities include grant funded positions for a .50 FTE Elementary Health teacher and a .40 FTE teacher for the Innovation Pathways Program at WHS. An investment will be made in new data resources, new HR procedures and systems, and increasing access to more online resources in an effort to increase the diverse applicant pool as well as a streamlined application process. In terms of the Full-Day Kindergarten allocation, David explained the Chapter 70 state aid increase projected to be about \$893,994 based on the FY24 funding formula which will result in no district or town subsidies. A total of \$655,769 is needed to fund FDK. A discussion ensued about the DESE formula for Chapter 70, which is the amount of funding given to every school district so it can provide an appropriate level of education. This could change from year to year depending on the number of students and the tax base ability/capacity of each district in order to meet a minimum level of funding. The plan for Chapter 70 in Wayland is to have recurring money each year for FDK. David added that if the Chapter 70 funding did not come to Wayland, he would not move forward with the plan for FDK.

The proposed FY25 level service budget totals \$52,630,763 which is \$2,477,568 or 4.94% more than the FY24 budget. A discussion ensued regarding the FY24 budget increase compared to the FY25 budget increase. David provided a financial summary of the level service budget and beyond level service noting that the 4.94% increase is level service; however, beyond level service funded by Chapter 70 is another 1.31% over FY24 bringing the combined total FY25 recommended budget to 53,286,532 or a combined percentage change over FY24 of 6.25% or \$3,133,337. A discussion followed about the COLA increases, steps and lanes over the next three years. David reviewed the elementary and secondary changes to personnel and non-personnel expenses, as well as districtwide expenses.

Susan Bottan reviewed the capital items that the School Committee voted to include in the FY25 Capital Plan that includes a boiler replacement at the Middle School, districtwide roof repairs, an elementary HVAC installation,

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another mini-bus for the district and athletics, replacement of rooftop air handling units at the Middle School, and a new student information system replacement for the district. These capital projects total \$903,300. Susan also mentioned the capital items that were not funded at this time.

In terms of the budget calendar, there will be budget discussions with elementary, secondary school staff on January 3 and January 8, but the date is to be determined for discussions with Special Education and The Children's Way. The School Committee will vote on the FY25 budget on January 23, 2024.

The Finance Committee left the meeting at 8:00 p.m.

Erin Gibbons and Erin Mueller left the meeting at 8:00 p.m.; returned at 8:02 p.m.

3.3 *FY24 Acting Superintendent Goals Update – Discussion of Goals and Indicators:*

This agenda item was passed over until January 3, 2024.

3.4 *Student Services Leadership Update (out of order):*

David reported that he will begin a search for a permanent Student Services Director, and Debbie Dixson could have a limited role in the search process. A discussion ensued about the timing of the process.

4. **Administrative Matters:**

4.1 *Announcement of the Review of Previously Withheld Content of Executive Session Minutes for Continued Non-disclosure from January 2010 – September 20, 2023, Exclusive of the Following Minutes Which have been Released with Redactions or Revised Redactions:* February 6, 2018, October 7, 2019, October 21, 2019 ES #2, November 18, 2019, December 9, 2019 ES #2, April 29, 2020, and January 6, 2021.

Erin Gibbons announced the review of previously withheld content of executive session minutes for continued non-disclosure from January 2010 to September, 20 2023 exclusive of the following minutes which have been released with redactions or revised redactions: February 6, 2018, October 7, 2019, October 21, 2019 ES #2, November 18, 2019, December 9, 2019 ES #2, April 29, 2020, and January 6, 2021.

5. **Special Matter (out of order after budget presentation):**

5.1 *Sustainability in the Schools, presented by the High School Green Team:*

The WHS members of the Green Team, along with members of Energize Wayland, and Ellen Tohn presented their proposal to move toward a focus of climate literacy/education in the Wayland schools. Climate literacy begins with the students and expands into the community. Over three quarters of Wayland students are concerned about climate change, but two-thirds have not had education in this regard. The data provided is in line with national data.

A survey was conducted at the High School which posed the question, "What do you wish the school had taught you about climate change?" Based on the results of the survey, the students requested that the School Committee works with the school administration to ensure that students are climate literate about the climate crisis upon graduation. Over 310 students and 131 adult community members signed a petition to support this initiative, including the vote of support by the Climate Committee as well as some teachers and principals. There are good intentions in this regard, but thus far, the impact has been minimal, thereby requesting guidance and support from the School Committee, adding that the State will provide guidance and support as well. Other districts have strong climate education, such as Concord Public Schools, Boston Latin, Minuteman, the Arlington Public Schools, the Fall River school district, as well as the entire state of New Jersey.

Ellen Tohn confirmed that the Energy and Climate Committee will assist, particularly in terms of resources and curriculum, adding that the curriculum is not a science curriculum per se, but can be integrated in math and civics. A discussion ensued and School Committee expressed their support in funding this curriculum initiative. The Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) has provided lessons at the elementary level which are interwoven within the curriculum, as well as other district-wide initiatives. Betsy Gavron described adding that the curriculum continues to evolve around this issue. Next steps were discussed, such as creating a district goal in this regard, community service for high school students particularly working in the High School garden, School Committee policy development, and asking the Wayland Public Schools Foundation to provide funding for climate related events and/or the curriculum.

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6. **Financial Matters:**

6.1 *Review FY24 and FY25 Enrollment and Class Size Reports:*

Susan Bottan reviewed the FY24 and FY25 Enrollment and Class Size Reports which is required by DESE each year in terms of the number of students and the demographics so that Chapter 70 funds can be calculated. The October 1 enrollment helps the administrators to project the budget for the following year. This year the Pre-K to Grade 12 enrollment is 2749 but was projected to be 2782 for FY24. A discussion ensued about the reasons why the projection was lower than anticipated. The highest number of students is in Grade 6 and the lowest is in Grade 1. In terms of demographic data, 107 students are in-district special education programs with most being in Pre-K and the elementary level, 524 students have an Individualized Education Plan (IEP), 89 students are English Language learners, 289 students are economically disadvantaged, 131 Boston residents attend the WPS, and 69 non-resident staff children are enrolled. Next year's enrollment is projected to be about 14 fewer students with most of the decrease at the High School.

6.2 *Discussion and Possible Vote of FY24 WayCam Budget Request:*

Jeanne Downs described the funding request proposed to the Finance Subcommittee by the Executive Director of WayCAM Jim Mullane, as WayCAM provides public educational and government programming for the residents of Wayland. Mr. Mullane requested \$15,000 from the Town and \$15,000 from the School Department in FY24, but also as an ongoing line item to sustain its operations. The Town and the School Department receives WayCAM services currently at no cost, as most of its revenue is generated through residents' paid cable bills; however, streaming is more popular than cable. Other options are being considered, such as implementing a fee, paid user subscriptions, and generating support from local businesses through advertising. Jeanne described the WayCAM services that are provided to the schools. Susan has the funding for FY24 which would keep the current staff and the accessibility of the programming. A discussion ensued about the schools' and Town's responsibility regarding funding. Jeanne will attend the Select Board meeting to update them about the School Committee's concerns and will ultimately follow up with Mr. Mullane.

7. **Consent Agenda:**

7.1 Approval of Accounts Payables & Payroll Warrants:

7.2 Approval of Minutes: November 15, 2023, November 29, 2023, December 6, 2023

There wasn't an accounts payables warrant to approve.

Jeanne Downs made recommendations to edit the November 29, 2023 minutes. They will be approved on January 3, 2023.

Upon a motion duly made by Ellen Grieco, seconded by Erin Mueller, the School Committee voted unanimously (5-0) to approve the consent agenda with the exception of the November 29, 2023 minutes.

8. **Matters Not Reasonably Anticipated by the Chair:**

Ellen Grieco reported that she and Erin Mueller met with HRDEIC about discussions about the Middle Eastern conflict, as well as the WSPN letters, particularly about how to have community conversations about difficult issues. The HRDEIC is meeting with the Select Board next week to ask about possible funding from the Town and schools in an effort to hold open discussion forums. Erin Mueller noted that WaylandCAN is also willing to support the community conversations in this regard. The School Committee supported this effort.

9. **Executive Session:**

Upon a motion duly made by Erin Gibbons, seconded by Ellen Grieco, the School Committee voted unanimously (5-0) to enter Executive Session at 9:33 p.m. for the purposes of (a) approving executive session minutes, as permitted by M.G.L. c.30A, §22: November 29, 2023 with the intent to withhold said minutes; and (b) discussing the December 4, 2023 open meeting law complaint filed by George Harris, as permitted by M.G.L. c.30A, §21(a)(3). A roll call vote was taken as follows:

| <u>Roll Call</u> | <u>Yes</u> | <u>No</u> |
|--------------------------|------------|-----------|
| Erin Gibbons, Chair | X | |
| Jeanne Downs, Vice Chair | X | |
| Ellen Grieco | X | |
| Erin Mueller | X | |
| Christina Rodrigo | X | |

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The School Committee will not be joined by other participants.

The School Committee will adjourn in Executive Session and will not reconvene in open session.

10. Adjournment:

Upon a motion made by Erin Mueller, seconded by Christina Rodrigo, the Committee voted unanimously (5-0) to adjourn at 10:02 pm. A roll call vote was taken as follows:

| <u>Roll Call</u> | <u>Yes</u> | <u>No</u> |
|--------------------------|-------------------|------------------|
| Erin Gibbons, Chair | X | |
| Jeanne Downs, Vice Chair | X | |
| Ellen Grieco | X | |
| Erin Mueller | X | |
| Christina Rodrigo | X | |

Respectfully submitted,

Erin Gibbons, Chair
Wayland School Committee

Observers:

See attached list.

Corresponding Documentation:

1. Agenda
2. Public Comment
3. FY25 Budget Presentation
4. Climate Literacy Presentation
5. Enrollment & Class Size Presentation & Report
6. Payroll Warrants
7. School Committee Minutes of November 15, 2023
8. School Committee Minutes of November 29, 2023
9. School Committee Minutes of December 6, 2023
10. Executive Session Motion