

## GROTON-DUNSTABLE REGIONAL SCHOOL COMMITTEE

High School Library  
Minutes of Special Meeting - FY13 Budget Hearing  
February 8, 2012

APPROVED 02.28.12

### PRESENT:

Mr. Erik Dichter, Secretary  
Ms Berta Erickson  
Mr. Jim Frey, Chair  
Mr. John Giger  
Ms Leslie Lathrop  
Ms Alison Manugian, Vice-chair  
Mr. Jon Sjoberg

### ADMINISTRATION:

Mr. Joseph Mastrocola, Superintendent  
Mr. Gerald Martin, Director of Business and Finance

**STAFF, PRESS, OTHERS:** P. Comtois, Groton Landmark; See attached sign-in sheet

### I. CALL TO ORDER:

The GDRSC Special Meeting was called to order at 6:04 p.m. by the chair, J. Frey.

### II. PRESENTATION:

#### A. FY13 Budget

J. Frey announced the draft budget on the district's website has a couple of mistakes and in particular, the staffing numbers on page 9 were incorrect and had ripple effects throughout the document. An updated budget will be posted on the website as soon as possible.

J. Mastrocola acknowledged the teachers, town officials, principals and site-based managers present tonight.

J. Mastrocola gave an overall summary of the proposed budget. The district's main mission is to ensure that students, parents and taxpayers of Groton and Dunstable receive quality and measurable teaching and learning outcomes consistent with the management of dollars and human resources provided. Improving student achievement is their collective goal. The various means that will be used to achieve this goal were highlighted. The proposed budget continues the district wide mission to lower class size district-wide, adds some programs, has a full administrative complement at each school for management and safety, increases textbook and material needs, has an increased focus on instructional technology and addresses direct services to students with some improvements to the physical plants.

Over the next few months, he said they are faced with some uncertainties, out of their control, which might require adjustments to the proposed budget and they are prepared to move forward with that if necessary. During the development of the budget, their major challenge is to be fiscally responsible in the approach and committed to maintaining and improving learning. They must also be vigilant of the current state and local economic restraints so that both the school district and municipal services are sustained.

With these fiscal and learning goals as their community blueprint, J. Mastrocola said the budget for FY13 is \$34,891,906. This figure represents a level funded budget from FY12, with an increase in necessary services and expansion of some programs with a zero dollar increase.

Ensuring sustainability of effort, fulfilling accreditation of the high school, complying with state regulatory requirements and maintaining strategic goals district-wide were the criteria used for developing the budget. Challenges included negotiating a new teachers contract and evaluation instrument, instituting a budget that recognizes the needs of Groton and Dunstable, accepting that revenue forecasts are somewhat uncertain and

considering the impact of spiraling health care costs. The instructional goals were reviewed.

J. Mastrocola said the major budget outcome, continued and sustained, is lower class size district-wide. Other featured outcomes were highlighted and include adding one elementary reading coach and one elementary math coach district-wide, adding one adjustment counselor for grades 5 to 12 which will allow for one counselor to be at the high school and one at the middle school, adding one instructional technology specialist, adding two teachers at the high school to reduce class size, upgrading the high school academic coordinators positions, adding a half time special education team chairperson, focusing funding for deferred maintenance projects and continuing the refresh plan for technology. He noted these all come with the same cost they had last year.

Sustained outcomes include maintaining extended hours at the high school library, keeping the curriculum coordinator K-8 position in the budget, which should be filled soon, and providing paraprofessional support to any student on an educational plan that requires the support.

**Swallow Union/Florence Roche** - With enrollment projections showing Swallow Union decreasing its population by 15 to 20 students, Principal Myerson stated his budget includes one less fourth grade teacher. The special education population is also decreasing and he has included a reduction of a half-time special education teacher. However, they are projected to have new students entering the school with needs that would require more support and he has requested two additional building assistants. He and Mr. Hoyt worked closely in developing their budgets and they agreed they need to add a .5 reading specialist to continue working with students, coaching and modeling for staff and assisting them in the area of curriculum. A .5 math specialist, having similar responsibilities, is also requested.

Mr. Hoyt is including one less second grade teacher and one additional third grade teacher, with the overall number of teachers remaining the same.

**Middle School** - To maintain low class sizes, Principal Silverman said they will keep the same number of teachers at each grade level. He reviewed the projected enrollments for FY13. Based on the number of special education students that will require inclusion/paraprofessional support, he reviewed the special education positions that will be needed. To meet the diverse social and emotional needs of students, they will be adding an adjustment counselor. Their PPE (Per Pupil Expenditure) for FY13 is approximately \$130 per student and some of the monies will be allocated for teaching supplies, technology requests and professional development in the areas of differentiated instruction, RTI training, C-Taught Teaching and Cluster Grouping.

**High School** - Principal Mastrullo said the budget has a fairly significant shift in priorities reflecting the NEASC report as a backdrop and represents a short term plan to address their long term goals. He is asking for a 1.0 math teacher to reduce class sizes. The Common Core State Standards, which require a four year math commitment, are coming and will require additional staffing. He is also asking for a 1.0 science teacher to reduce class sizes and expand course offerings. They are looking to expand the adjustment counselor position from a .5 to 1.0. The additional hours will make the counselor available each day rather than 2.5 days a week. They are looking to upgrade the high school academic coordinators positions with a modest stipend increase. The budget significantly increases software purchases, structural equipment and replacement of computers.

B. Erickson said she is happy to see the change with the guidance counselor as it has been need for a long time.

J. Frey asked how the virtual high school program is going. M. Mastrullo said they have one trained teacher and that gives them 50 seats (25 per semester) and the program has been a huge success. They plan to train another teacher which will give them another 50 seats.

**Building and Grounds** - While the budget bottom line did not change, Steve Byrne said various line items did change to meet their maintenance goals. Deferred Maintenance/Capital Improvement was increased by approximately \$26,000 to fund special projects in FY13 which include continuation of the Swallow Union rubber

roof recoating, refinishing the 10 year old high school gymnasium floor and completing the gas conversion at Florence Roche. He noted the cost of doing business with vendors has increased along with travel and mileage charges and the Maintenance of Buildings - Outside Services line item was increased by about \$3000.

**Technology Department** - Gary Babin said they have made tremendous progress in updating the equipment and his budget includes a request to continue that effort. The wireless infrastructure will begin in the high school and the project will provide the district with a secure and flexible way to offer wireless connections. He would like to invest in the Tech Team itself and with all the new initiatives, would like to have Phyllis Maynard be full time.

J. Frey asked him to comment on the shift they have made on how they acquire laptops, PC's and desktops. G. Babin said they are in the first year of a three year lease of laptops and this brings in more machines and replaces outdated equipment more quickly.

**Food Service** - Pam Patnode said the Nutrikids prepayment software continues to be a success with over 700 families and over 1200 students participating and has greatly reduced the amount of money owed the lunch program. The Crusader Café opened at the high school this year selling after school snacks and has received strong support from students, staff and parents. This year they partnered with Lanni Orchards of Lunenburg where they get most of their fresh produce. The menus consist of a greater variety of fresh fruits, vegetables and whole grains. The Nutrition Committee began the Garden to Table project this fall using the middle school south courtyard. Raised beds have been built and spring planting of vegetables and herbs is about to begin.

J. Frey said the Food Service is not part of the operating budget and is self funded through a Revolving Account.

**Special Education/Student Services** - Cam Huston said their goal continues to be providing services for students with disabilities based on their IEPs in the most effective and efficient manner possible while being in compliance with the special education regulations and the law. Next year they will continue to provide training for the high school special education staff in the area of transition. They are required by regulation to provide a transition plan for every student with disabilities over the age of 14. The plan makes sure they are getting the services they need to graduate and enter secondary education or the world of work. Another endeavor is to work with general education in the area of RTI (Response to Intervention) so they are equipped to provide significant interventions to students who are starting to struggle in accessing and maintaining success within the curriculum. They welcome the addition of a .5 Team Chair and an additional school adjustment counselor.

With the school committee's decision last year to outsource special education transportation, J. Giger asked if the transportation needs are being met. C. Huston said they are being met very well and the vendor is very responsive to their requests and needs.

J. Frey asked if there are any program changes that need to take place based on the results of this year's Coordinated Review. C. Huston said no. The findings dealt more with the technicalities such as timelines and these are easy to fix.

**Peter Twomey Youth Center** - K. Tuomi manages six self-supported Revolving Accounts funded by tuitions, community donations and the annual Peter Twomey Memorial Golf Classic. The PTYC is the base for the Extended Day Programs, community education programs and scheduling for all the district facilities.

J. Frey pointed out these revolving funds are not in the budget proposal.

G. Martin reviewed the anticipated debt and operating town assessments. Dunstable's increase in operating assessment will be \$33,965 and their debt assessment will increase \$40,922, for a total of \$74,887. Groton's operating assessment will be \$98,720 and their debt assessment will increase \$110,507 for a total of \$209,227. He noted they were able to refinance the high school debt this year, saving the towns \$996,000 over the remaining 10 years of the bond payments. Most of the savings were upfront in the years 2012 and

J. Mastrocola said they had a budget timeline that began in December and tonight is an opportunity for public comment. Budget questions will also be taken at the February 14<sup>th</sup> and February 28<sup>th</sup> school committee meetings and a vote may be taken on the budget February 28<sup>th</sup>. The final assessments are sent to the towns following the school committee's vote of a final budget number. The operating assessments could go up or down but will most likely stay the same. Unanticipated budget factors could change the dynamics and these include health insurance premiums, special education tuitions, changes to Chapter 70 aid and collective bargaining agreements.

In summary, J. Mastrocola said they are proposing a level funded budget of \$34,891,906 for FY2013 with a 0% change and a zero dollar change.

J. Giger does not feel people understand the impacts of the special education variable and stated it can cost an annual expenditure of \$100,000 or more for an out of district placement to meet a child's needs. The need can happen at time during the school year.

A. Manugian pointed out that discussion by the Governor or the State or the House with respect to level funding of Chapter 70 money does not necessarily mean level funding for every district. J. Frey heard no one would get less than last year. J. Sjoberg said level funding from the state does not take into account the loss of \$300,000 to \$400,000 of grant funding from the Federal Jobs Bill.

J. Frey asked about the general dip in enrollment and what that means in terms of cost to the district. J. Mastrocola said overall globally, population has decreased and the trend is happening throughout suburban districts. Projections show their enrollment numbers will stay about the same, or dip a bit, over the next three to four years. He noted the state formula for Chapter 70 funding could change in the next year or so and be based on enrollment numbers.

With the special education paraprofessional staff increasing by 12, J. Frey requested a program story behind this.

J. Giger commended and thanked the principals and the district staff directors for their participation, collaboration and cooperation in putting the budget together. He is convinced this approach allows them to develop a budget that truly puts the emphasis on student learning and achievement. J. Frey added the transparency is excellent and commended the administration, Gerry Martin and the Budget and Finance Sub-committee.

### **III. Public Comments**

K. McKenzie congratulated the committee for a job well done. He asked if there will be any focus on looking to buy digital chapters rather than entire books. J. Mastrocola said they will want to look at it but they are just happy to get a technology refresh plan in place but agreed it is a valid point. J. Frey said it does reduce the poundage in the backpacks. L. Lathrop pointed out the high school reduced their textbook expenditures by about 33% and plan to use other technology. K. McKenzie said regional school transportation needs to be increased by the legislation and suggested letters be sent to the legislatures. J. Frey agreed this has never been fully funded.

The updated budget documents will be available on the website as soon as possible and J. Frey requested people take the time to review them and forward any questions.

J. Giger said volunteers are needed for the Community Reading Day at Florence Roche on March 8<sup>th</sup>. Anyone interested in reading may contact Ms Dolan at [bdolan@g-day.org](mailto:bdolan@g-day.org).

**IV. Adjournment**

B. ERICKSON MOVED TO ADJOURN AT 7:14 P.M.    SECONDED BY A. MANUGIAN  
**SO VOTED IN FAVOR UNANIMOUSLY**

Respectfully submitted,

Susan H. Smith  
Recording Secretary

With attachment