

WILLINGTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS
BOARD OF EDUCATION
SPECIAL BUDGET WORKSHOP
MEETING MINUTES
MONDAY, JANUARY 25, 2016
(Until Board Approval)

The meeting was called to order at 7:01 pm by Chairman Erika Wiecenski at the Hall Memorial School Media Center.

PRESENT: Steve Ortiz, Erika Wiecenski, Shawn Kowalyshyn, Marybeth Wallett, Ann Grosjean, Michelle Cunningham, Superintendent David Harding

ABSENT: Herb Arico

PRESENT TO SPEAK

Michelle S., a resident of Willington, educator (in another town) and with two children in the school system, expressed her concern about the budget proposal. She stated that she believes the budget presented is too low and that several things need to be put back in the budget. One is the interventionist position at Center School, stating that it is necessary in providing intervention to students, support academic and behavioral needs, offer resources, and expert advice. She also believes that there is a critical need for Instructional Assistants, especially with the increase in kindergarten classroom size, so there is an extra set of eyes and hands to help out. Michelle also stated that some comparisons with the town of the Ashford school system: the band starts in grade 4, preschool for every 4 year old gets in, and they also have Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEAM). She is very happy with education in Willington, but wanted to make a point in what we are competing with when going to a regional high school. She wants to increase opportunities for all students.

Kirstie F. stated that she moved to Willington because of the excellent school system and how important it is to think about long term, focusing on the children. She is very impressed with the school services in Willington and appreciates the difficulties of budgeting, not focusing on cuts, but the students themselves.

Linette B. wanted to state that she would like the budget to be approved, support educational leaders in this town, and maintain good educational status and reputation. She would like to approve the budget to show we will support the needs of educational leadership.

Tracey H. stated that she agrees to trust this proposed budget and is strongly in favor of the board passing the proposed budget; sending it to the board of finance as is before there are cuts in what the students need.

Peter L. wanted to express an issue with the proposed budget, wanted attrition to be addressed.

Approve minutes of 1.18. 2016

Motion by Erika Wicewski
Second by Shawn Kowalshyn
VOTE: **unanimous**

Motion **passed**.

CAPITAL IMPROVEMENT PROJECTS (CIP)

CENTER SCHOOL:

Replacement of 2 unit heaters at CES- \$15,715

Erika Wicewski stated that she sees these more as an urgency, the rest of the Board agrees.

Replacement of doors (garage, gym, basement)- \$11,259

Board sees this as a priority

Generator- \$40,000

Hall School has a generator for the entire school. Currently at Center School the generator could run for a few hours. The first proposal has a 5-7 day run time and would only run heat and water for the school and would keep the building safe rather than just open. The other option is more expensive, and would keep the power on for the entire school. Michelle Cunningham wants to propose to move this to FY 18-19, the rest of the board agreed.

Tractor for HMS- \$25,000

More discussion on this with CIP, could be older equipment that could be borrowed for this. Board agrees this is a priority, utilize existing tractor could be discussed with CIP.

Superintendent Harding mentioned the need for a possible new playground at HMS and questioned if there is a better way to do this now that 4th grade is not at HMS. Another option is to remove some of the playground, leaving two slides, a set of monkey bars, and to add a new swing set near the other equipment. If we consider a lesser playground for Hall School, money saved could be put to something else that is more pressing. Erika Wicewski mentioned that the after school program for CES and HMS is at Hall School and wanted to make sure the playground is adequate for those students as well. Erika stated that she is comfortable downsizing it because of the other playgrounds we have in town. She still wants to make sure it is age appropriate. Superintendent Harding said adding a fitness trail could be added to the downsizing of the playground. The rest of the board agreed downsizing the

playground instead of getting a brand new one as long as it is age appropriate for both schools.

Kelly Trueb Chairman of CIP- wanted to correct a statement- CIP has a work in progress five-year plan, proposals are put on a plan, not actually approved.

Motion by Michelle Cunningham to propose to approve CIP projects, minus the tractor project, with the added changes.

Second by Erika Wiecenski

VOTE: **unanimous**

Motion **passed**.

Motion by Michelle Cunningham to approve tractor project for FY 17-18

Second by Erika Wiecenski

Yes: Steve Ortiz, Erika Wiecenski, Shawn Kowalyszyn, Ann Grosjean, Michelle Cunningham

No: Marybeth Walleth

Motion **passed**.

Budget Workshop:

Superintendent Harding presented the proposed Willington Board of Education Budget including all changes discussed. The Board agreed to have a brief overview of the budget and to address certain areas from the Board. The budget presented was \$8,133,582 a 3.84% increase for the next year. The Board members expressed their concerns and asked clarifying questions regarding the budget.

The first cut to be addressed was the money from the music program. Jason Phillips spoke about the keyboarding instructional program that would cost \$14,000. The money would go to purchase new full size keyboards, headphones, etc. Custodial costs were also discussed in the budget, and how the numbers were calculated. The interventionist position cut was also addressed and discussed; to reinstate the position would be a cost of \$63,000. Michelle questioned about added cost to update the content website, calculated to a \$15,000 increase.

PRESENT TO SPEAK

Shannon G., a former Board of Education member addressed the Board about the conflict that occurred through the budget workshop and stated that the Board needs to take the time to get to know Superintendent Harding and about the quality of work he has done in the past. She stated that the Board needs to look at the big picture before doing cuts to the budget. She also stated that she could not want anything more than good education in this town.

Melissa M. stated that she originally planned to move out of Willington, decided not to because of the education system in Willington. She expressed how much interventionists and teachers had helped her family and that she is opposed to cuts regarding teachers, paraprofessionals, and interventionists in the system.

Kristin B. commented on the playgrounds proposal and stated that she has children that use the playgrounds, and that the Center School after school program is completely full, and they using the playground on a regular basis. She also commented on how great the education and intervention system is.

Jennifer addressed the interventionist position; she has had both children that benefitted from interventionist. She expressed that she would like to see that position added back in the budget.

Hannah commented that she moved to Willington for the schools and the thought of cutting any help or interventionists will not benefit the students. We need to focus on what can help the students and where their futures are. Willington has a sense of community and education is important.

Barry Wallett, former member of the Board of Education, wanted to express that there is a whole other group of people that are not here and to them every dollar matters.

Steve Ortiz proposed that he was not comfortable with an approval of this budget until further discussion about it with Superintendent Harding.

Michelle Cunningham stated this budget is the Board's budget, not the Superintendent's budget. Superintendent Harding fully defended his credibility and integrity, along with other members of the Board.

APPROVAL 2016-2017 BUDGET

Motion by Michelle Cunningham to approve existing budget with reinstating interventionist position adding \$63,000, adding three paraprofessional positions to be used as necessary adding \$72,000, adding \$14,000 for keyboard lab in the music program, and \$15,000 to website development cost, with total increase of \$164,000 being added to proposed budget.

Second by Ann Grosjean

Discussion:

Marybeth Wallett said she believes Steve Ortiz should be heard and does not support that vote and does not feel the Board should discount another Board member's questions.

Steve Ortiz noted that he would like to have clarity and discussion from Erika Wiecenski and Superintendent Harding. Erika Wiecenski stated she has voted to not take action because of needing more information, but this is not the case. She also is not comfortable with the questioning of Superintendent Harding's integrity. Michelle Cunningham added this budget is worthwhile and efficient; these are valued services to be put into the budget.

VOTE: Yes: Erika Wiecenski, Ann Grosjean, Michelle Cunningham, Shawn Kowalyshyn
 No: Steve Ortiz, Mary Beth Wallett

Motion **passed**.

The Board thanked all of those who spoke and everyone who came and listened at this meeting.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:58 pm.