

EASTON BOARD OF EDUCATION REGULAR BUDGET WORKSHOP
Helen Keller Middle School-Learning Commons
Thursday, February 13, 2020
7:30 p.m.

Minutes

ATTENDANCE:

Easton Board of Education: Parker, Chieda, Hicks, Goldstein, Reed, Stinson
Administration: McMorran, Reiss, Pierson Ugol, Fox Santora, Kaplan, Del Conte, DiBartolo,
Brownstein, Mohr
Others: 30 members of the public

CALL TO ORDER

Mr. Parker called the meeting to order at 7:30 p.m.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Carolyn Oppenheim, Hunting Ridge Road, Easton: asked the board to fight for the HKMS library. She also spoke about the importance of the school social worker and how she seems to be stretched very thin. Class size is very important to our students.

Remigio Melo, Kachele Street, Easton: stated that he and his family are okay with tax increases for reasonable expenses for our schools. Mr. Melo spoke about his concerns about class size and does not support splitting an administrator between two schools. He stated that Mrs. Fox Santora knows his children's names and all of the children's names and she is able to maintain a small-school atmosphere. Mr. Melo encouraged the board to keep the school administrators where they are.

Devon Wible, Woodland Drive, Easton: spoke about the results of the survey taken by students last year that showed that 50% of our eight graders are involved in risky behaviors. In light of these results, Mrs. Wible encouraged the board to consider ways of increasing support staff such as school counselors.

Kathleen Rahner, Bartling Drive, Easton: spoke about the efforts she is taking to be better informed about the budget process and asked where to look for more information. She spoke in support of the other residents who spoke before her during public comment and stated that Easton is known for its great schools and class sizes. Ms. Rahner also wished to learn more about potential offsets to the budget.

BOARD MEMBER COMMENT

Mr. Stinson welcomed the public to the meeting and explained that efforts are underway to better articulate the way that the tri-board system works and getting more information out to the public is a goal of the board. Mr. Stinson spoke about the budget process that Mr. Parker embarked on several months ago to improve transparency and the earlier dissemination of information about the budget. Mr. Hicks said that the Board of Education meets the second Tuesday of every month. Mr. Hicks also said

that the board is balancing the town's funds with what the board thinks is important. Mrs. Chieda referenced the challenge in Easton of a lack of new revenue and encouraged communication with the Board of Finance and attendance at Board of Finance meetings as a way of learning more about the town's budgetary challenges. Mrs. Chieda also acknowledged the communication efforts of the PTO. Mr. Parker thanked the members of the public for attending and being interested in the process. Mr. Parker clarified that issues discussed at the last meeting are not actual cuts being made. He said that the board will make a presentation to the Board of Finance on March 4th at 7:30 PM at the Senior Center to present whatever is voted on by the board and defend the education costs. Mr. Parker outlined the budget information presented at the November and December Board of Education meetings. He stated that contractual salary increases constitute \$318,000 and health care cost increases are \$226,000, which totals a 3.2% increase to the budget. Mr. Parker spoke about the town's need to budget for Joel Barlow High School, police, fire, and other departments. Mr. Parker stated the board will work hard to gain what is needed for the schools. Mr. Parker said he is not willing to vote for larger class size.

DISCUSSION AND POSSIBLE ACTION: 2020-2021 BUDGET

Motion: move to add the Director of Finance's report to the agenda. Stinson, Hicks. Approved. Unanimous.

Mr. Reiss gave an updated insurance analysis report. He said that we are continuing to have a good claims year with seven out of twelve months reported, with average monthly claims just below \$192,000. Mr. Reiss explained that there are sufficient funds from contributions to carry us through the year. The last three years of claims are used to anticipate the current year will end with approximately \$450,000 in reserves. The recommended reserve level is three months of claims or approximately \$400,000.

The board discussed the advantages and savings associated with the introduction of the Junior Bridges Program for HKMS. Mr. Reiss took the board through the additions and subtractions in place to arrive at a 3.92% increase for the proposed 2020-2021 budget. The board discussed the allowance for hiring an 8th grade math teacher. Mrs. Kaplan explained that two years ago, a strong candidate they were interested in hiring for the position was outside the hiring allowance in the budget at the time. Leaving a hiring allowance in the budget for a candidate with a master's degree and up to 16 years of experience changed the percent increase for consideration to 4.04%. The Discrete Math course at HKMS was also discussed. Continuing the Discrete Math course at Keller changed the percent increase for consideration from 4.04% to 4.14%.

Dr. McMorran spoke about this year's budget process and the direction received from the Board of Education chair, which was to bring to the board a budget that represents what is needed with no wiggle room, or a budget as lean as possible. He explained that they squeezed everything needed for the schools into less than a percent increase since contractual obligations are 3.2%. They originally removed Discrete Math from the budget and made other difficult reductions to try to achieve a tight budget. Dr. McMorran stated they would like to be able to continue to offer the Discrete Math course.

The board discussed the media specialist, media paraprofessional and recess paraprofessional at HKMS. The recess paraprofessional is \$7,182.00 of the budget. The board and Dr. McMorran discussed

removing the recess paraprofessional if the HKMS media specialist and media paraprofessional remain in the budget, since that would be adequate staffing to cover recess.

Motion: move to add the Junior Bridges program to HKMS. Reed, Stinson. Approved. Unanimous.

The board voted unanimously to add the Junior Bridges Program to HKMS.

Motion: move to set the Board of Education Budget for 2020-2021 at \$17,367,436.00, or 4.1% increase. Goldstein, Chieda. Approved. Unanimous.

The board voted unanimously to remove the HKMS recess para, restore Discrete Math and give the M.A. +16 allowance for an 8th grade math hire, thus passing a 2020-2021 budget of \$17,367,436.00 or a 4.1% increase.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Marco Gentile, Delaware Road, Easton: asked if future cuts to the budget were a possibility.

Beverly Dacey, Redding Road, Easton: spoke about the budget process between the Board of Finance and the Board of Education.

Krista Zilberg, Lobdell Labe, Easton: spoke about the interest of the Board of Education for Easton's children. She encouraged people to put pressure on the Board of Finance for the school budget.

BOARD MEMBER COMMENT

Ms. Reed thanked those in attendance for coming and asked the public to be in contact with the Board of Finance and to attend the March 4th meeting with the Board of Finance. Mr. Stinson thanked Mr. Parker for his work in bringing transparency to the process. Mr. Hicks also thanked Mr. Parker. Mrs. Chieda read a portion of an email written by Mr. Parker that referenced historically low education percent increases, town financial pressures and community responsibility to provide the best education possible for the children. Mr. Parker recognized Paul Lindoerfer, member of the Board of Finance, for his attendance and participation. Mrs. Chieda acknowledged the members of Easton town boards and government in attendance.

ADJOURNMENT

Motion: move that the meeting be adjourned. Hicks, Stinson. Approved. Unanimous.

The Easton Board of Education Budget Workshop was adjourned at 8:42 p.m.

Recorded and Submitted by Jenny Chieda, Easton Board of Education Secretary