

Richmond Consolidated School - School Committee

Meeting Agenda

Tuesday, April 14, 2020 6PM

Conducted Remotely

APPROVED

Present: Peter Dillon, Jill Pompei, Jenevra Strock, Adeline Ellis, Dewey Wyatt, Susan Benner.

Guests: Sharon Harrison, Megan Babich, Anna O'Donnell, Cindy Bartlett, Cristina Lenfest, Eileen Jones, Joy Mullen, Katie Bovard, Kleeco, Mary Shook, Michelle Smith, Penny Saupe, Amity, Amanda Hale. Brigid Naventi, Rick Bell, Shannon Smith, Shawn Schaffer, Cathy Gamberoni, Tracy Fancher, Jessica Godfroy, Gill Romano, Debra Alibozek, Chad Gingris, Brian Trembly, Kim Hosley, Katie Rickard, Doug Wentworth, Errin Rooney, Peter Smith, Lauren Broussal, Doug Bruce, Erin Weeden, Bob Gniadek, Sandi Wotkowski., Shannon Smith, Susan ?, Lisa Callahan, Julia Sabourin, Neal Pilson, + 22 callers

1. Call to order 6:05pm

Dewey announced the meeting is being recorded per MGL Ch30sec20(f) requirements, and that the meeting was posted and being held according to current Open Meeting Law requirements.

Meeting was held by conference call due to the COVID-19 issue.

[An Executive Order from the Governor of Massachusetts relieves public bodies from the requirement in the Open Meeting Law that meetings be conducted in a public place that is open and physically accessible to the public, provided that the public body makes provision to ensure public access to the deliberations through telephone, internet, or satellite enabled audio or video conferencing or any other technology that enables the public to clearly follow the proceedings of the public body in real time.

In addition, all members of a public body may participate in a meeting remotely; the Open Meeting Law's requirement that a quorum of the body and the chair be physically present at the meeting location is suspended.

All other provisions of the Open Meeting Law, such as the requirements regarding posting notice of meetings and creating and maintaining accurate meeting minutes, as well as the limited, enumerated purposes for holding an executive session, remain in effect.]

Meeting connection: <https://global.gotomeeting.com/join/436619325> (872) 240-3412 Access Code: 436-619-325

Dewey said he was extending Public Comments time to allow a larger number of people to speak on the current school budget status. The order of the agenda was also changed to bring the budget discussion up earlier.

Dewey said there has been a lot of work to date on the budget. This is difficult budget in a very difficult and challenging unrepresented timeline we'll continue to work hard on behalf of the students we serve. The SC is working toward a Town appropriation amount to put forth. One way or another we all need to find some common ground. The SC wants to sustain an above avg educational environment, but also is acceptable to taxpayers.

The SC is targeting to vote on a number for the Town Appropriation Request in about two weeks. This will occur at the end of the required Budget Public Hearing on the proposed FY21 Richmond Education Budget. One way or another to some common ground on funding the Richmond Education budget to preserve and supports continuing to provide an above average, full, enrichment education to the students we serve, but is also acceptable to the taxpayers and our neighbors, and sensitive to the unsure economic times ahead of us,

Peter: Started out with an "all in" or "wish list" budget that was above a 13% increase. They knew it was too high, and it was brought down to around 9%. The BAC asked for the budget to be brought down to a 3%. The Admin got it down to 3.92%. Upwards of 80% of a budget is in salaries and benefits. SO to get to that level, the reduced budget has a 2.1 position reduction. This continues to evolve. How those cuts will look is not yet determined. Peter know what the BAC is grappling with is the

2. Public Comments

The Committee provided over 70minutes where there was a lot of good discussion concerns raised about various aspects relative to having to make some cut.

Natalie Gingras: Shout out for Tammy kitchen crew who are providing meals 5 days a week.

Dewey: It's in difficult times when what is really valuable in a community really shows. This is an example.

Adeline: asked if we will get a refund from the bus company since they aren't running?

Peter: Got guidance from the State says we would enter in to process, template from attorney. We are starting the process of negotiations with the bus company.

Kimmie Lecco: Can a summary of different avenues being looked at necessary to attain the budget be provide.

Dewey: we will be following after with a budget discussion.

Peter: He asked to clarify the process. He is seeing a lot of quoin in the chat boxes and suggested they be asked out loud.

Errin Rooney: What is the difference between the “all in” budget and the budget we have been operating under this year.

Peter: All in was over 13%. The status quo budget would be around 9% increase.

Sharon Harrison: Confirmed that it would be around a 9% increase. Can go with status quo as there are some things need to be added to the budget to meet student needs.

Peter: further explained to the group aspects of setting a budget and how to consider the range of factors going up and down.

Errin: Next question- Concerned about how you can just hire someone only to have to let them go. Why was this not seen earlier?

Peter: Spoke to the current economic uncertainty.

Dewey: Spoke about new projected SPED costs not known this time last year. The situation now is so different that what it was even just a few months ago.

Jenevra: Confirmed there are new significant SPED costs.

Jessica Godfrey: Wants clarification on exactly what is being cut. Lots of rumors he teacher cuts and how it will impact her children. Rumors floating around

Dewey: There is not an answer right now while it is still being looked at. Can't talk about specifics

Peter: The honest answer is as of today he does not know. Lots of discussions and analysis continuing. Possible retirement incentive. The uncertainty is hard on staff and parents. When we make a decision we will share it.

Jessica Godfrey: Will we as parents have input into what programs will be cut?

Peter: Further explained to process of pulling a budget together. And the multiple venues for public comments. The Budget Public Hearing is where the SC may approve a dollar figure, if they feel

Dewey- Current targeting 4/28 for the Budget Public Hearing. The SC comes up with a number for the town votes . The Town Meeting is already postponed to June 17.

Cindy Bartlett: Concerned that there is not an excess of staff so cutting will make it more difficult. Especially challenging when some are out.

Peter: The building runs “lean” Challenge is we have to get to a certain “number.” He would love to find a way to keep people in the building

Cindy: Cutting staff is a disservice to our kids. The pandemic is not their fault. They need us now more than ever.

Cristina Lenfest: Spoke to how the quality of our school will be affected. Said she know the SC is committee is committed to the very best education for the students, but learning there were cuts for the next year.

Shawn Schaffer: Spoke to concern over the future of the school with staff being cut. What are we paying for as taxpayers. This school makes a big difference in students' lives, they moved he because of the school.

Rachel Kanz: Concerns with the librarian being cut. Peter confirmed it is being considered. The librarian is also the town librarian so is more than just a once a week employee.

Doug Bruce: More directed to the Town, why are we taking such drastic measures? Are we over reacting? Does it make more sense to ask the union to accept a pay freeze instead of cutting positions?

Peter: Salary freezes are an option, but can have longer term issues and several staff have brought this up. Don't want to move an issue from one year to the second year.

Bob G, Chairman of the Finance Committee: Said Dewey and Dr Dillion did a good job summarizing the sequence of events leading up to this unfortunate situation. Gave the background of the budget season- all taxes will be dropping on the state level so the town is planning for the worst case scenario, but hoping for the best. Initially were planning for a 6% tax increase which is now not be acceptable for the Finance Committee or the people of the town. Spoke about the stabilization account and the free cash account. Bob continued to explain more of what is being looked, including what transpired back in the 2008 downturn. They are sensitive to the taxpayers so aiming for a 2.5% increase for property taxes. Looked at tax flow and wanted to do something now rather than later. Hoping to be proactive and stay ahead of the issues. BAC is looking at the best financial interests of the town.

Kimmie Lecco: There are favorable loans from many of the local financial institutions available for those who cannot pay tax bills. We need to keep this in mind to help folks in need and having our children pay for it. The culture of our school is what brought us to the school and would hate to see that diminish.

Joy Mullen: As the President of the Richmond Education Assoc there is no one else cutting, except Adams-Cheshire. Questioned the need for budget cuts based on the fact that no other school is doing this in Berkshire County.

Dewey: Spoke to how everyone local situation is somewhat unique.

Peter: Responded to some questions in the chat stream about the budget process and timeline. Sharon, Jill, and Peter send out information before the SC Budget Public Hearing tentatively set for 4/28 6pm.

Lauren: The Civic Assoc. has declined to run a Baby Town Meeting this year. The Selectman said the town will run it but didn't know the date.

Neal: Baby Town Meeting is Saturday 6/13 at 10am .

Shannon Smith via Errin Rooney: Concern about the high teacher turnover rate. Think outside the box. RCS is doing as amazing job delaying with the current crisis and support them back.

Melissa Roller: Reminded that just because the SC approves a budget does not mean that the Town has to approve it. If the Finance Committee is putting the cart before the horse as a Town we need to talk back to the cuts.

Neal: Offered clarification. The Town votes on the school budget- the Finance Committee/Budget Advisory Committee approves or disapproves the budgets and makes a recommendation. The townspeople ultimately vote.

Dewey: Cannot remember a time that there was *not* a Finance Committee endorsement. It is an obvious goal to have the Finance Committee endorsement on a number SC want to go with.

Dewey: I hope though this healthy discussion people are getting a good understanding of the process.

Lauren: It is not just the parents with children in the school today who value the school, we all do.

Adeline: Questioned how much the current closing savings will be.

Peter: We will only, maybe, save \$10K. There will not be a significant amount of money as most think. Then spoke to the money Richmond may get from the state (this money will have guidelines around its spending).

Generally Richmond does not get a lot of money from the State as it is seen as high need so eligibility is low.

Jessica Godfroy: Brought up the fact that good teachers who are at risk of losing their job may leave, so we need to more urgently work to resolve.

Peter: Shannon ask about requesting for anything and everything. Clarified that we simply are not eligible for many.

Neal: We are still in discussions. All comments from tonight are appreciated understood. He is concern about the economic situation coming for the County. We are all committed to the School, fought hard to turn perception around and increase support for the school since it is providing a great education to the student and is the heartbeat of town.

Discussions will continue.

Dewey closed public comments, thanked everyone for the comments and the other board members for joining and the discussion to help common understanding of the factors, and hopefully leading us to a workable solution.

3. Correspondence - none

4. Budget review, revisions and setting the public hearing date

DW went through the process for getting a budget. PD- Summary of budget, working for several months for budget. Ended with a budget increase 13%, cut back ~8%, Budget Advisory Committee asked to go down to 3%. PD noted 80% of budget is salaries and benefits etc. So right now looking at a reduction of 2.1 positions

Sharon Harrison: Presented five alternatives

Adeline: Wondering where the School Choice funds come in?

Adeline: Asked what the CAP program entails

Dewey & Jill explained CAP

Adeline: Asked about the School Psychologist

Jenevra: The psychologist is twice a week.

Sharon Harrison: Discussed the potential decrease in state revenue that was brought forward at the Roundtable (?) today.

Sue: Makes sense that CAP goes for next year- but it is not enough of a savings to make a difference

Dewey- Agreed

Peter: Spoke about the need for compromise

Discussion of Retirement Incentive

Discussion of the Sped budget increase

Sharon left the call.

5. Principal's Report

Jill explained the proposed FYR21 calendar. Sue motioned to accept calendar, Adeline seconded it, Unanimous vote in favor.

Jill discussed the good job teachers have been doing in posting daily and weekly schedules. Shout out for staff. She has enjoyed sitting in some classes and see what everyone is doing. Looking to open School Choice (SC) in K, 2, 4, 6, 7 grades. The sum will increase for school choice, but we will still be at a balanced level.

6. Superintendent's report

PD reported several public records requests that have come in and the responses have been completed.

COVID19 response: no MCAS, all work is "credit or no credit", staff evaluation has been put on the back burner, voted to work through spring break. Balancing tension with kids being engaged and have parents involved.. The Governor going to decide in next week or so whether school will open or not. He will share widely as soon as know.

Sue moved to set the public hearing on April 28. Adeline seconded. All were in favor.

Dewey said to be sure all budget feedback the committee members received be brought to Peter and Sharon Harrison.

Adeline expressed a desire to meet before the 4/28 meeting. Dewey agreed. Peter agreed.

Lauren brought up the Long Range Planning Committee meeting is on 4/28. There was agreement that there likely are not priority items for the committee at that time. Dewey will confirm with Danielle Filio and confirm SC meeting on 4/28. Peter to have Amy Scott prepare the agenda and the Legal Notice required for that.

7. Special Education Director's report
Discussed needs to make an Individual Remote Learning plan. Otherwise things are going reasonably well in this challenging time. Staff is working very hard to meet the student needs.
8. Financial Report
Peter reported no issue with current spending relative to budget, no issues for the School Committee to react to. There are some line items that are and is likely an issue where expenses have been assigned.
9. Superintendency Contract, Advisory Committee Update
Dewey: Superintendent Update- Discussion of different models and that there will be a consultant who helps us navigates best path.
Peter: Discussed possibility of a consultant team.
Lauren: The last meeting with Berkshire Hills was productive. Peter agreed.
Dewey clarified the Advisory Committee is still in existence.
Lauren stated the SAC will reconvene when we have more information from the consultant.
Discussion around the need for specific information in order to make good decisions.
10. Review and approval of the minutes from: 3/3/2020 and 3/18/2020, 3/24/2020.
3/3/2020 minutes: Motion to approve as amended by Sue, seconded Adeline. All in favor.
3/18/2020 minutes: Motion to approve as amended by Dewey, seconded Adeline. All in favor.
3/24/2020 minutes: Motion to approve as amended by Sue, seconded Adeline. All in favor.
11. Positive messages -open call to hear positive observations related to our educational efforts.
Dewey closed with positive messages.
12. Other unforeseen items - none
13. Adjournment and Warrant -
Sue motioned to adjourn at 8:43. Dewey seconded. Unanimous approval.

Peter is going to let the School Committee know what is to be done with warrant packets and what provisions can be made to insure they are reviewed as needed so bills can be payed.

Submitted SB, RK