

TOWN OF WISCASSET  
BUDGET COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES  
March 20, 2008

The meeting was called to order by Chair Steve Mehrl at 6:32 PM at the Wiscasset Municipal Building.

Budget committee Members in attendance: Chairman Steve Mehrl, Judith Colby, Sherri Dunbar, Pamela Dunning, Robert Fairfield Sr, George Greene, Richard Hanson and. Tony True. Member absent was Karl Tarbox.

Motion was made by Judith Colby to approve the agenda. Motion was seconded by Sherri Dunbar. Motion passed 7-0.

The Budget Committee met with Superintendent of Schools Jay McIntire in order to better understand issues involved with the 2008/09 school budget and the voting thereof

Superintendent McIntire explained that the state has written new law that requires schools to approach the budget process as if they are already in an Regional School Union (RSU) even though they may not be. The effect of the new law is immediate and applies to all school in the state. RSUs have 11 articles on which to vote. When asked if a lawyer had looked into this to see if Wiscasset has to comply, he stated that a lawyer had not been consulted but that it was clear Wiscasset does have to comply unless there is a town charter that states otherwise. Wiscasset does not have such a charter.

There was a question as to the effect of a no vote on the secret ballot. If the article fails, would that give the school a budget at EPS? The answer was no. If the article fails, state statutes allow the school to expend 3/12 of the amount of the previous budget to continue operations until a new budget can be passed. Any money expended during this period would come out of the new budget once it does pass.

Superintendent McIntire pointed out that part of the reason the school budget is so high is that about 60% of Wiscasset teachers are at the top of the pay scale. He discussed the process of cutting a teaching position. A teacher must be served with 90 days notice that the position is being cut. The teacher is paid for this 90 day period. The teacher also might have unused sick time that needs to be bought back. The teachers listed on the budget cuts by level worksheet are already sure to be cut and will have the 90 days notice well in advance of the next school year. If more positions are cut due to further budget cuts, the teachers that are cut will still have to be paid the portion of the year that falls within the 90 day window.

There was a question about the 1/2 physical education teacher that is listed as cut. The question of how is 1/2 of a position cut. The answer was that the position will become part time. The part time position still includes some benefits. There are 1 1/2 PE teachers in the high school. Some schools our size have only 1. One person can cover classes for both

sexes as there is no need for an adult in the locker room. If there is a problem in the locker room that requires an adult presence, a teacher of the same sex from a nearby classroom can be summoned to assist the PE teacher.

Superintendent McIntire talked about the System Administration line on the budget and why it looked high. He explained that the line that designates his salary included the amounts paid to him by Alna and Westport Island. Not all of his pay comes from Wiscasset.

Superintendent McIntire produced and explained a grid that shows the cost per student for Alna, Westport Island and Wiscasset students. There had been some discussion about the cost per student being high than the tuition rate. When the costs of transportation and the Superintendent's pay was added to the tuition money from Alna and from Westport Island and those totals were divided by the number of students from each town it showed Alna paying \$10,993 per student, Westport Island paying \$13,107 per student and Wiscasset paying \$13,665 per student. The math was tried at the meeting and the numbers did not match. The Wiscasset amount became over \$16,000. Superintendent McIntire said he would go back and ask how the original work was done and do the work again.

A handout that demonstrated the amounts paid for health and dental insurances was discussed. Employees taking single coverage pay nothing or less co-pay than those who have other family members included on their policy.

Teachers have an automatic pay level raise each year of \$1000. They also receive an increase in the hourly rate that is negotiated in the contract. There are 21 levels of pay scale in teachers pay before they reach the top level.

There was some discussion about E-Rate. E-Rate money is a federal grant that is applied for every year. Money from this grant is designated to pay for technology needs such as telephone lines, Asynchronous Transfer Mode (ATM) systems, internet, etc. The amount of E-Rate is different every year and can not be predicted with any degree of certainty.

The total budget for vocational education in Bath next year is \$8,515. The funds come out of Wiscasset's EPS money. That is Wiscasset's share in starting a new program in electrical wiring. Wiscasset is able to send 8 to 10 students to Bath vocational education each year.

The state sets a maximum rate that the schools are allowed to charge other towns for tuition. Towns can pay more if they want to but the school system is not allowed to ask for more. It is highly unlikely that a town would vote to pay more than the required amount.

Superintendent McIntire has received 3 estimates for EPS allocation so far. He may receive 2 or 3 more before the final amount is decided.

According to Superintendent McIntire, inflation has increased 13% since the 2005-06 school year. The school budget has increased about 1%. The school department has tried to absorb the inflation rate by cutting services where it can. With declining enrollment, it is hard to continue to offer all of the programs and services and not raise the price of education per child.

Superintendent McIntire pointed out that the state uses only the number of resident students in its calculations of local price per student compared to the state average or price per student. It does not count the tuition students in the process. This can make the numbers look very inflated.

Superintendent McIntire state that he did not believe that EPS came from the average of the highest performing schools. He said that it came from the average programs and services criteria in the most efficient schools. He further stated that 82% of the schools in Maine operate over EPS.

Two teachers are cut from next years staff. That is a total of 18 teachers cut since 2005-06 school year. Declining enrollment makes smaller classes and the number of teacher needed have gone down with the student population.

There was an explanation that the state reimbursement of Special Education has a 2 year delay. The state allocation for the amount of money spent this year will not actually be paid back to the Wiscasset school system for 2 years.

It is not clear if the Budget Committee will be able to offer an amount on which the public may vote other than at the open town meeting. This needs to be looked into by the Selectmen and town manager to be clarified. There is the opinion that the Budget Committee should in combination write an article to be printed by the local papers that describes its recommendations and explains how the recommendations were reached. Educating the public about the budget is essential to avoid confusion.

Looking at the Budget Summary by Function, it was noted that the school committee's budget was considerable higher. This includes over \$200,000 in retro pay for teachers in case this item should be agreed upon in the new contract. There is some thought among committee members that the money should not be raised until the contract is signed and the school should have to come back to the town and get that at a special town meeting.

In some prior years there were huge carry forwards that were kept within food service. This year's budget was the first in several that didn't rely on carry forward, so it jumped dramatically. The huge increase last year was with the explanation that we would be budgeting for the full cost, but also to allow the food services director to put new menus and operations in place that were designed to increase efficiency. Those changes have helped. The requested budget for next year is much less than last year

Superintendent McIntire gave an explanation of the ED281 form which is sent to show the schools their EPS rates. This document shows the school administrators what the state

believes to be the basic needs to educate the students. When the final draft is given to the schools, it will include the amount that the state will actually allocate to Wiscasset for education.

There was a brief discussion about busing students that raised questions as to the efficiency of the process. Alternative bus schedules could save time and money.

Having no further business, Pamela Dunning made the motion to close the meeting. Motion was seconded by Sherri Dunbar. Motion passed 8-0. Meeting closed at 8:52 PM.

Respectfully submitted by Pamela Dunning.