

**THE GLOUCESTER PUBLIC SCHOOLS**

*Our mission is for all students to be successful, engaged, lifelong learners.*

**Minutes of the School Committee Public Hearing  
On the FY 2012 Operating Budget**

Wednesday, March 30, 2011

Fuller School Auditorium

7:00 p.m.

**Members**

Val Gilman, Chairperson  
Melissa Teixeira, Vice Chairperson  
Kathleen Clancy, Secretary  
Roger Garberg  
Michelle Sweet  
Tony Gross  
Mayor Carolyn Kirk

**Administration Present**

Interim Superintendent Dr. Joseph Connelly  
Assistant Superintendent Brian Tarr  
Assistant Superintendent Shayne Trubisz  
CFO Tom Markham  
Bill Goodwin, GHS Principal  
Jean Perry, West Parish Principal  
Ellen Sibley, Beeman Principal  
Gregg Bach, East Gloucester Principal  
Tammy Morgan, Plum Cove Principal  
Cherylann Parker, Veterans Principal  
JoAnne Reiss, SPED Director  
Dr. Richard Safier, Superintendent-Elect  
Andrea Pretzler President GTA

**Also Present**

CFO Jeff Towne  
City Council President Jackie Hardy  
Councilor Bruce Tobey  
Councilor Steve Curcuru  
Councilor Paul McGeary  
Maggie Rosa, GEF Executive Director

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Recorded by Cape Ann TV

**I. SALUTE TO THE FLAG**

Chairperson Gilman called the public hearing to order at 7:05 p.m. and recognized Superintendent-Elect, Dr. Richard Safier, Cherylann Parker, Ellen Sibley, JoAnne Reiss, Tom Markham, Tammy Morgan, Shayne Trubisz, Jackie Hardy, Bruce Tobey, Steve Curcuru, Jeff Towne, Paul McGeary, Gregg Bach, Maggie Rosa, Brian Tarr, and Jean Perry. Chairperson Gilman then stated the mission of the Gloucester Public Schools.

**II. INTRODUCTION** – Chairperson Gilman thanked Dr. Connelly and his staff for the level of detail and transparency contained in the draft FY2012 budget. She explained that the School Committee has been busy meeting with our City Councilors to go through the budget book,

copies of which are located at the Sawyer Free Library, the school administration office, and the City Clerk's office and she urged the public to take a look at it and at the School Department's website, [www.gloucesterschools.com](http://www.gloucesterschools.com).

Chairperson Gilman stated that Kathy Clancy is the School Committee's liaison to our legislators, which has been extremely beneficial in coordinating lobbying with groups throughout Massachusetts. She also recognized all of the incredibly committed School Committee members, who have gone above and beyond the call of duty, and stated that she is proud to represent them.

Chairperson Gilman recognized the committed teachers and staff who have also gone above and beyond the call of duty. She stated that they have done the best they can under the circumstances to deliver a quality education to our children.

Chairperson Gilman indicated that the School Committee is committed to overseeing a district that is focusing on teaching and learning and improving the quality of education. She wants everyone to understand that the School Committee has put tremendous thought into the budget cuts, and it is painful to have to lay people off. However, the governor is proposing a \$570 million cut to state local aid, the \$890,000 ARRA grant has ended, and the district is losing a minimum of \$562,000 of Chapter 70 funds to the charter school in FY2012.

Chairperson Gilman stated that it continues to be very clear to the School Committee that the funding formula for commonwealth charter schools is not fair and that she believes everyone in the community should rally behind charter school funding reform, even if you support charter schools. She indicated that new revenue for the city is uncertain and thanked our partners for their tremendous support of our schools. Those partners include the GEF, School Connection, GFAA, Gloucester Maritime Heritage Center, Pathways, Wellspring, Rotary, YMCA, and PTOs.

Finally, Chairperson Gilman briefly reviewed the documents handed out to the audience, which are available on the district website. The documents included the budget summary, a letter to the editor on the FY2012 budget process written by the School Committee B&F Chairperson, Kathy Clancy, and a summary of Tier I cuts made to date.

### **III. THE PROPOSED FY 2012 BUDGET**

Chairperson Gilman highlighted the FY2011 successes in teaching and learning and education management, FY2012 budget goals and challenges for FY12, and summarized the FY12 Tier I least harmful cuts that the committee has approved to date. She indicated that if anyone did not want to speak tonight, they could send her an email to be read into the record at upcoming meetings. She also assured the audience that the School Committee is putting a tremendous amount of time into this difficult FY 2012 budget process and thanked Dr. Connelly for his leadership.

Dr. Connelly expressed his gratitude and appreciation for the team effort that occurred in putting together the 450-page budget book. He then reviewed the budget development process, details of the Draft 2 budget, and Tier II reductions under review by the School Committee.

#### IV. PUBLIC COMMENTS AND SUGGESTIONS

Chairperson Gilman invited the audience to speak, and the following individuals made the following comments:

**Lisa Morgan** teaches a self-contained classroom of children with significant, severe special needs at Veterans Memorial. Not everyone agrees that they are severe or the most difficult population in our community, but she feels they are. She has children with intellectual delays, mental health issues, and significant and severe learning problems. She could not manage her population without the paraprofessional staff, and the students could not be transported safely without the staff that brings them every day on a small bus. The School Committee talked about the children who are taken out of district and the amount of expenses that takes -- \$240,000 for one child, the price of transportation for the entire group. She understands that budget cuts need to be made. However, in the long run, without the support her students need to make it in the public schools if we don't have the paraprofessionals and the safe transportation, they will end up going out-of-district, and that is going to be a "budget-buster." If her seven kids cannot make it, that is going to go way up in price. She hopes that the amount of staff lost will not cause a huge problem in the future with more budget cuts.

**Elizabeth MacDougall** is a senior at GHS who has been through all four years of the French program. She thanked the School Committee for their consideration of the school budget. She is aware that the French 3 and 4 classes are currently on the Tier III cuts, but she would like to emphasize the important role those classes have played in her school career. She is now able to pursue a minor in French, and she has found that studies of the French culture, language and geography have been extremely helpful and an inspiration in other courses. She thinks it would be a shame to see these classes go, especially for the French 1 and 2 classes, because they would not be able to have the four years of language that she had the opportunity to have. Speaking in terms of what colleges are considering, they may be looking for students who have pursued three or four years of language.

**Caroline Bauke** is a senior at GHS and a representative of the French 1 class. She would like to represent both the present and future GHS French students who love French class. While she understands that these cuts in curriculum are being made to establish next year's budget, she asks that funds not be cut from the French program. She submitted a petition composed of GHS and O'Maley students that was drawn up by this year's freshmen wishing to continue studying French for the duration of their high school career. She added that, as a GHS senior, she has spent four years in the French program and that they are the four most precious year's worth of memories that she has. She loves all of her classes, but the bond she has built with her French teacher is definitely one of the strongest bonds she has ever built, and she would be very sorry to see that this would not be an opportunity for future generations.

*Note: Chairperson Gilman stated that the School Committee has voted to table Tier III cuts.*

**Peter Dolan** has a daughter who will be a student at O'Maley School next fall. He thanked the School Committee for the hard work they are putting in this evening and for giving the public the opportunity to participate. He is also the lead plaintiff in the Dolan v. Chester lawsuit, which asks the court to revoke the charter of the Gloucester Community Arts Charter School. As a plaintiff in that ongoing litigation, he did not comment on the details of that lawsuit. However, he reminded the School Committee that when the defendants in the lawsuit asked the judge to dismiss the suit, the judge said no. In fact, the judge said, "There is a strong factual showing that the Commissioner" – that would be Mitchell Chester, the Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education at the state level – "despite his affidavit to the contrary, did not perform his own independent evaluation of the Gloucester Community Arts application, but to the contrary ignored the state regulations and caved in to political pressure to recommend the project to a board" – that would be the state Board of Elementary and Secondary Education – "eager to approve at least one charter application regardless of its merit."

Starting in the coming year, money that would have come to the Gloucester Public School district is scheduled to be diverted to the charter school, which, despite its name, is not accountable to our community or our elected city officials directly. These are elected officials of the city that we now know for sure has a population below the minimum census of 30,000, established by the state as a requirement for opening a new charter school as opposed to a regional charter school. At the March 2<sup>nd</sup> School Committee meeting, Mayor Kirk indicated that while the district will lose funding due to the end of the federal stimulus program, the city will ensure that the district will not lose funding due to the diversion of funds to the charter school. He thanked Mayor Kirk for that, along with her ongoing commitment to education over the past years. Should the charter school continue to operate, he thinks it is important that the School Committee and the community convey to Mayor Kirk the importance of honoring that kind of commitment to our schools, both in the coming year and in future years when even more money is scheduled to be diverted to the charter school.

**Jason Grow** is a parent of two children at East Gloucester School and one at O'Maley School. He thanked the School Committee for the work they do and acknowledged that they have a tremendously difficult job. He speaks to a number of the members on a regular basis, and he knows how much they care about our schools, our children, and our teachers and principals and the staff that support them. That has not gone unrecognized by him and the people he knows who appreciate every minute they spend on behalf of our children.

He stated that he came from a very different meeting this evening. He came from the budget meeting at the Gloucester Community Arts Charter School. They were establishing their budget for next fiscal year based on a presumed enrollment of 200 students. They are basing their budget on \$2.2 million. That is the minimum they are going to base it on. It is actually probably closer to another \$140,000 above that. They are anticipating in that budget a profit (their word, not his) of at least \$225,000 and as much as \$365,000 to the good. That is money that is coming from this district, from each and every student in our schools, and it should not be the case. Peter has already outlined that the school was inappropriately granted in the first place. We are going to have to operate under the assumption that it is going to open in September. But we have an obligation and a challenge, which is for the School Committee, the mayor and the city councilors

who are in attendance tonight and who will be deliberating on this budget in the coming months to keep our children in our schools. That is your job, because every dollar that is cut from this budget, every dollar that goes away to the charter school is an invitation for parents who are unsure, unsettled, and worried about their children's education to take them there. They will leave because they are concerned about their child's education, just as he is. His children are thriving. It is a good district. But there are parents who are afraid. They don't know. They're unsure. You must assure them that we have a commitment to education in this community and that they are making a choice to stay, and they're making it for good reasons. And you do that by showing them that they are welcome here, they have the resources that they need to ensure that their children have an excellent education, and that our community as a whole values education.

Madam Mayor, we talked about economic engines. There is no singular greater economic engine in this community than our school district. If we have excellent schools, we will drive economic development in this community. It is time as a community that we establish that as a singular priority. The school up on the hill – the “Blackburn Industrial Academy,” as he likes to refer to it – can only thrive if we fail in our job to keep our students in the schools. Do not give them a reason to go. Give them a reason to stay in the excellent schools that we already have. That is our job, and that is our charge.

**Leora Ulrich** of 7 Grandview Road is a school nurse in Gloucester and a member of the Mass. Nurses Association. She is the mother of two GPS students. She understands the financial picture the city is in. She knows it is very bleak, but she believes that the safety and well-being of every student affected by the cuts to the nursing staff is at risk. The middle school is currently staffed with two full-time registered nurses and a health aid to ensure that the 1,000 or so students that attend the middle school, which include students with diabetes, asthma and epilepsy, are able to learn in a safe environment that is capable of addressing their needs. She believes that the safety of students with medical needs, as well as other students, is jeopardized when nursing positions are eliminated. Also in jeopardy is the Essential School Health Grant that the nurse leader applies for each year. The Department of School Health Services established this grant to augment the existing funding in the district, not to replace funds that are cut. She quoted from the memorandum, “If school nurse coverage is reduced, the Department will consider this factor in its decision to continue funding the grant.” The health and safety of each child in the Gloucester school district must be a priority. Please reconsider the extreme cuts to the nursing staff when deliberating the budget.

She feels that the students in the Gloucester Public Schools have been through a lot over the last several years. Her son and daughter experienced the closing of Fuller School, which was very painful. She feels that we need a level funded budget this year. She would also like to challenge the Gloucester Daily Times to become more of a partner with us. We have seven schools in the district, and she would love to see coverage of each school equally.

**Mike Nocela** of Autumn Lane has a son with nut allergies at Plum Cove, and they are cutting the nurse there. That is a deal-breaker for him sending his son there. It's a long way from downtown to Plum Cove. You've got to have a nurse on staff. Never mind allergies; something can happen to the kids. Please reconsider the nursing cuts.

*Note: Dr. Connelly clarified the cuts to the nursing staff and explained that there will still be a full-time nurse at Plum Cove School.*

**Danielle Bauke** is a middle school student. She stated that the charter school is taking too much money out of the budget and it was incorrect to happen anyways. She thinks we should reconsider some people that we are taking out of the school system because some of it is unfair.

**Tom Sullivan** of Wheeler Street stated that the School Committee is making all of the easy cuts, such as teachers and nurses, but is not cutting any administrators. He asked when they are going to get to the higher staff people so we can save the teachers and nurses. He specifically mentioned two assistant superintendents, two assistant principals at the high school, a dean at the high school, and three assistant principals at O'Maley. He could go on, but he hasn't looked at the numbers. He thinks there needs to be something done about cutting some of the administrative overhead and staff rather than the people who are going to teach our population.

**Question from unidentified audience member:** What prompted the School Committee to buy the POS system? Tom Markham explained that it allows us to have a better tracking system on the amount of receipts and sales. Chairperson Gilman suggested that she speak to Dr. Goodwin about it.

*Note: Chairperson Gilman recognized Dr. Bill Goodwin and Andrea Pretzler and thanked them for being at the public hearing.*

**Kristin Michel** of 864A Washington Street stated that part of the school community is the noon supervisors, the nurses and all of the things that keep our schools safe and happy for our children. She spends a lot of time at Plum Cove and Beeman, and you can see the love that the kids get from the nurses. If we cut noon supervisors and nurses, that sense of community and those people that bring that sense of community there is really going to suffer. You say that these cuts are going to help keep teaching and learning, but making those cuts takes time away from teachers to do those things that will need to be done with the absence of those people in the schools that provide critical services to our children. We really need to consider retaining those positions because they matter. Those noon supervisors matter. They do more than just supervise on the playground. They are there as a presence when the students get off the bus in the morning, when the kids have breakfast, when they need help. The nurses' aides matter. She is asking the School Committee to reconsider those cuts.

*Note: Dr. Connelly clarified the cuts to the noon supervisors and explained that there still would be noon supervisor coverage at the schools.*

**James Cook** of Knowlton Square has been a high school teacher for 12 years, has a daughter at Plum Cove and a son who will be there this coming fall. Listening to all of this, especially the last few speakers, reminds him of the history of a lot of this. He is worried about cutting on top of cuts. We're looking at level funding for this year and a noble attempt at level services for this year that couldn't be held. So, now, we're cutting on top of a history of cuts. So, yes; we can get it done and stitch it together and figure it out, work harder, put in our extra time. We'll ask for help from parents, and parents will come through. We'll ask for help from the GEF and GFAA and make it happen. But especially with the earlier comments about the charter school and the increased losses that are bound to happen to the city as a whole that hopefully won't be borne entirely on the back of the schools, he worries about cuts on top of cuts and that we're only looking at the last budget. He knows, because he has talked to some people involved in it, that documents have been pored over and people are trying to do the best they can, but again, he wants to put into the air the idea of cuts on top of cuts and not just looking at the last year but taking a long view of all of this and what has been lost over the course of a decade, what will be lost over the course of the next five years. That's the concern he has as a teacher and as a parent.

**Beth Morris** is a parent of two juniors at GHS and a veteran of these hearings. It has been her custom at seven of the last public hearings to come and beg for the reinstatement of librarians in our schools. She would like to put that marker in once again, fully knowing that it is not possible. She would just like to build on what Mr. Cook said; that the cuts upon cuts kind of betray the meaning of "level funding" and that we used to start out at a baseline budget that made progress, that brought back services, that increased programming, that fulfilled the community's dreams for what education could be. She understands that the situation right now makes an effort at what some would call a "pie in the sky" budget may be a wasted effort, but she would like to challenge the School Committee as our leaders for our schools. Maybe it's not part of this budget process, but those dreams and those aspirations and those goals should still and always be part of the conversation. Please keep the libraries, the new programs at the vocational school, all of these things that are in our hearts we know best for our schools and our children. Keep them in mind.

**Michael Pratt** is a grandfather of children in the school system and whose children all went through the school system. He's got a great education for how hard the School Committee is working. It's been a long time since he's been to a School Committee meeting. He knows from being a firefighter and being in the budget system fighting for pennies and nickels, he's got a good idea of what you've done. In spite of the fixed costs that you have, which you have no control over, you've really made some tremendous cuts in trying not to hurt the students. He wishes more parents would come to these meetings to see that by just helping their students, it helped the School Committee, and it probably would have been a better force in keeping the charter school out. He expressed his respect and appreciation for all of the members of the School Committee.

**Beth Goldberg** of 37 High Street stated that she's looking at this auditorium, and it's really painful. This was her school, and now what it's used for is a School Committee meeting with 20/30 people. Once we lose something, we don't get it back. So, everything on the cut list is sad and upsetting to her and devastating. We've been fighting and fighting and losing and losing.

“Mayor Kirk, I’m begging you. We cannot lose any more. We’ve lost librarians; we’ve lost teachers; we’re losing paraprofessionals.” And to say that we can continue, of course we’re going to continue. We’re going to work hard, and we’re going to make it happen because that’s what teachers do, but it’s not right, and we have to support our children, the future citizens of Gloucester. She misses Fuller School. She’s about to put on a play. She thanked the Gloucester Education Foundation, who is helping tremendously. She is worried that she doesn’t have enough seats for all the families who are coming to watch their children. She wants to get our schools back and not lose any more.

**Tim Miller** of 1 Gardner Terrace has two children in the school system. He thanked the School Committee for their amazing work on this depressing budget and stated that he appreciates all of their work. He also thanked everybody that is here because he thinks it’s important that they’re contributing to this cause. One thing that we need to not forget or definitely mention is the morale of those people responsible for inspiring our children. He thinks that it’s obvious and justifiable to say that morale is probably low with our teaching staff and those who are in charge of inspiring our children. If we keep on cutting and keep on firing and taking away and taking away and taking away, it’s difficult. He knows that they love what they do and that they do the best they can with what little they have, and he thinks they should be commended for doing so well, but our thinking needs to change. We’d better start thinking quick and fast about not just making the bottom line here but how we basically boost the morale of those who inspire our children and try to keep the people that are in this city from going elsewhere. The last time he spoke here, back when there was the question of dissolving this school, he was the person who said, “What’s the plan?” And the question he mentioned at the time was, had they given any thought to how many children would opt out of the school system. At that time, the chairperson mentioned that we have never come to the maximum amount of whatever; we’ve never reached that number, and he didn’t think that was going to happen. Just from common sense wise that the number of people opting out of the school system has increased quite a bit since Fuller School was dissolved, and he thinks that is something we need to take into consideration. He has two kids in the school system, and he wants to keep them in the school system. At the same time, he wants to do the best for his children.

Mr. Miller asked the following questions:

- Is there any way that we can put a committee together outside of the School Committee and try to do some fundraising? Is there any way to augment this \$1.6 million? Or maybe we could even have a major vision of \$3.2 million and keep the jobs that we’re thinking about cutting and maybe even increase. He doesn’t know if that can be done this year or next year, but he thinks if we don’t start thinking about improvements rather than cuts, we’re going to be in trouble.
- As someone who just sat back on the sidelines and watched the whole charter argument, whether you’re for it or not, it seems that it would have been common sense to have just rented them the building and said, “We’re going to fight you on this, but we have a facility that’s empty. Take it; make improvements to it. We hope that you don’t exist,

but go for it” and take in those revenues. That ship has gone, but he’s interested to know whether or not there’s anybody else interested in leasing this building and whether or not we’re considering those options.

**Maria Zervos** has a student at West Parish. She feels that talking to people in Gloucester who have young children and those who don’t have children yet, they really don’t know all of the wonderful things that are going on in the district. She feels that if any resources could be put to that, it’s essential that people understand the quality of education that students are getting here. She would also like to make a plea for getting some investment from the city as a whole, the community of Gloucester. Other places like Rockport and Manchester do overrides every so often, and they get a lot of support for them and they make a good case for why the money is needed. She would love for Gloucester to also have that sense of community engagement with the education here and to see why it’s important. Yes; no one wants to pay more taxes, but this is really important. If in some way the School Committee or the city government could make more of a case for that, there are lots of parents who would be able to help with that, and we would be able to make a really good case. She thinks that is essential to move forward. We do it at the PTO level. If we could do it on a community-wide level, perhaps we might be able to alleviate some of these issues.

Chairperson Gilman recommended that Ms. Zervos contact an organization that was referred to as “One Gloucester,” which was chaired by local attorney Mark Nestor and Leslie Sarofeen. This organization collected 3,500 names of people that were committed to support an override several years ago. She also suggested talking to people in Manchester who are successful in doing overrides all the time. Chairperson Gilman stated that the GEF, GFAA and School Connection are always looking for volunteers to do fundraising for the schools.

The School Committee members made the following comments to close the public hearing:

- Chairperson Gilman asked the audience to send the School Committee any suggestions on anything that they could cut back on. They are willing to think out of the box and will have as many meetings as needed to discuss suggestions. Chairperson Gilman also suggested that if people have good things to say about the schools, they should write a letter to the Gloucester Daily Times and make their feelings known to the community.
- Ms. Teixeira thanked everyone for their attendance and interest and stated that their voices have been heard. She indicated that this budget does not have much to work with, so their ideas are definitely encouraged.
- Kathy Clancy noted that the audience should be grateful that several city councilors attended the public hearing. She is not giving up on the budget they have presented and is going to fight for our schools as the priority. She asked the audience to make their voices known to their city councilors that education needs to be our priority and that the long-term health of the community is affected every time we don’t value education.

- Mayor Kirk thanked everyone for attending and stated that it has been very sobering to hear the feedback from the audience. She indicated that revenue is only increasing 1 percent but the budget is increasing 4 percent. She stated that the mayor's job is to put a balanced budget before the City Council, so there is a long way to go. We will not know the local aid figures until mid-April, and we don't have a date on when we will fully understand the health insurance picture.
- Mr. Gross thanked everyone for coming tonight and stated that we need to have a strong voice. It's a very difficult budget, and we really need the support of the community to show that the community supports its schools. The PTOs also need to have a full voice in the process.
- Dr. Connelly stated that he is impressed and encouraged by the support and sincerity of the audience's comments showing that they care about the schools. He indicated he is leaving in about six weeks and thanked everyone for making him feel very welcome. He stated that he totally enjoyed his time in Gloucester and cannot tell us how impressed he is with what we are doing to improve the quality of education in our school district. He also congratulated the community partners for what they do for education in Gloucester.

## **V. ADJOURNMENT**

On a motion by Kathy Clancy, seconded by Ms. Teixeira, it was unanimously

**VOTED:** 7 in favor zero opposed, to adjourn the School Committee Public Hearing of March 30, 2011 at 9:25 p.m.

*All reference documents and reports are filed in the Superintendent's office.*

*Maria Puglisi  
Recording Secretary*