

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 2015 Proposed School Budget**

Wednesday, April 2, 2014
Gloucester High School Library
7:00 p.m.

Members

Jonathan Pope, Chairman
Melissa Teixeira, Vice Chairperson
Kathy Clancy, Secretary
Tony Gross
Michelle Sweet

Administration Present

Dr. Richard Safier, Superintendent
Gregg Bach, Assistant Superintendent
Hans Baumhauer, Dir. of Finance
and Operations
Erik Anderson, GHS Principal
Matt Fusco, Veterans Principal
Dr. Telena Imel, West Parish Principal (7:15)
Ellen Sibley, Beeman Principal (7:53)

Others Present

Paul McGeary, City Council President
City Councilor Melissa Cox

Recorded by Cape Ann TV

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- I. CALL TO ORDER** – Chairman Pope called the public hearing to order at 7:04 p.m. and stated the mission of the Gloucester Public Schools. He also stated that the hearing is being recorded.
- II. SALUTE TO THE FLAG**
- III. INTRODUCTION** – Chairman Pope noted that April is Autism Awareness Month and stated that special education costs represent 28% of the FY15 proposed budget.
- IV. PROPOSED FY 2015 BUDGET PRESENTATION** – Dr. Safier presented a slide show on the proposed operating budget for FY15, including the budget development process, strategic planning, and the district-wide strategic objectives and initiatives contained in the District Improvement Plan. Those initiatives include continuation of the BSRI literacy program, implementation of a new K-5 math program, development of a standards-based report card, expansion of the co-teaching model at Veterans, writing across the content areas, continued support for STEAM learning, expansion of technology at O'Maley, and the addition of a theater arts position at the high school, which would be funded through the school choice revolving account.

Dr. Safier discussed the district's mandated initiatives, including the evaluation system, development of district-determined measures, the PARCC exam, and RETELL. Ongoing initiatives consist of curriculum mapping and community outreach, including an online "Help Desk" at \$7,500 per year.

Dr. Safier stated that the district is in the process of reviewing a report from Walker Partnerships on the special education program. The report will be presented to the School Committee in late April or early May. He does not believe the report will have an impact on the FY15 budget. He also spoke about the implementation of a 1:1 digital environment for Grades 8 and 9, the funding for which lies outside the budget.

Dr. Safier reviewed the FY15 proposed budget and proposed adjusted budget, which includes \$175,000 of the \$383,053 supplemental appropriation received for personnel. He noted that the small increase of 0.4% in ordinary expenses is due to an offset of health insurance savings.

Dr. Safier reviewed significant increases to the budget, including COLA for staff and some new positions. He noted that the \$529,295 COLA represents a 2% increase for 573 employees and stated that the GHS IT technician and IT integration specialist will be funded through retirements.

Finally, Dr. Safier discussed the number of ELL students per school, increases in special education costs and other non-salary increases, savings to the FY15 budget of \$393,591 for health insurance, losses in grants, salary increases, major ordinary increases, departmental increases/decreases, a proposed budget summary pie chart, and requests not contained in the proposed budget. Mr. Baumhauer noted that the out-of-district tuition cost for 60 children is \$4 million.

(Councilors McGeary and Cox left the meeting at 7:45 p.m.)

- V. PUBLIC COMMENTS AND SUGGESTIONS** – Val Gilman read a prepared statement in support of the proposed budget (see attached.)
- VI. DISCUSSION** – Chairman Pope indicated that the Building & Finance Subcommittee will be meeting on Friday to come up with a recommendation for the full committee on the final budget to be submitted to the Mayor. He offered committee members an opportunity to voice their comments or concerns.

Ms. Teixeira reiterated that the increase in salaries should not be a surprise since the district has 573 employees. She also reminded the committee that the 2% COLA represents settled contracts and that there are seven more contracts to be negotiated for FY15. She noted that there could be other costs above the 2% COLA associated with those negotiations through proposals.

Ms. Teixeira asked the committee members to keep in mind the difference in salaries of school employees and city employees, noting that comparable city employees receive higher salaries and the possibility of the district losing good employees because of this disparity. She also reminded the community that Gloucester is a Level 3 school district and stated that the School Committee wants to move up to Level 2, which requires resources either through personnel or curriculum. She stated the importance of maintaining and/or implementing the initiatives contained in the budget to try to achieve that goal.

Ms. Sweet stated that she believes this is a very responsible budget and that the new math program is a step in right direction for our students.

Kathy Clancy indicated that there have been a lot of discussions on the initiatives that the district is currently undergoing and would like to implement in the near future, such as the new math program. She noted that the savings from health insurance enables the district to make new investments to accelerate growth in student learning. She stated that the district also needs to continue investing in literacy. Finally, she pointed out that special education costs are mandated and the district has no flexibility with funding those costs.

Mr. Gross stated that the proposed budget reflects the hard work that the administration has done on focusing the district on where it needs to go. He noted the importance of curriculum mapping, development of a standards-based report card, and the use of data to assess students' strengths and weaknesses. He indicated that it will take an incredible amount of time to develop the mandated district-determined measures (approximately 130) and the cost of substitutes does not come close to what has to be absorbed in the budget to be able to get these initiatives up and running. He believes the proposed budget is extremely responsible and does that quite well.

Finally, with respect to the 2% COLA increase, which is the biggest increase in the budget, Chairman Pope noted that employees are working much harder and he is very happy to support that increase. He also reported that approximately \$300,000 was already cut from the proposed budget before tonight's presentation to try to come up with a budget that is sustainable by the community.

VII. ADJOURNMENT – On a motion by Mr. Gross, seconded by Ms. Sweet, it was unanimously

VOTED: 5 in favor zero opposed, to adjourn the School Committee Public Hearing of April 2, 2014 at 8:02 p.m.

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

*Maria Puglisi
Recording Secretary*

Mr. Chair, School Committee, and Dr. Safier,

My name is Val Gilman and I live at 75 Revere Street. My son is an 8th grader and attends the O'Maley Innovation Middle School.

Having sat in your seats for the past six years in my role as an elected official, I wanted to thank this committee for your due diligence and oversight on this year's budget. I've read all of the meeting minutes.

Thanks also to Dr. Safier and school administration for doing your work in putting forward your best possible budget that supports the district's most important educational priorities.

As a community member who values the benefit of a strong public school district in Gloucester, there are several new initiatives in this year's budget that I wanted to support.

1. Growing our Information Technology staff is an important addition. In addition, professional development to support our one on one technology for 8th and 9th graders. I also agreed with the change to centralize the IT budget into one document. I trust that we have included enough professional development to support our middle school and high school teachers adjusting to their new chrome books. My understanding from my son's 8th grade teachers is that this PD includes upcoming "Innovation School" grant funding for training in Burlington, a district that has been successful with a one on one technology learning environment.
2. Establishing a 2% line item increase for all bargaining units, as opposed to depending on free cash to provide for this shortfall in past years.
3. Expanding the co-teaching model at Veteran's Memorial School, to make sure that all of our students get necessary instruction and services.
4. Investing in a new math program district wide, aligned with the new common core standards.
5. Finally, and of particular interest to existing drama/performing arts students at GHS and current 8th graders going on to GHS, adding a new position for a theatre arts teacher at GHS. As you know, our performing arts and drama program is popular and strong at O'Maley. This area, a component of the "A" or Arts in STEAM, deserves to be equally strong in grades 9-12. A special thanks to two parents on the GHS site based, Sarah Grow, and Amy Beth Healey, for keeping this theatre arts theme on the radar, and to Principal Anderson and Dr. Safier for following up with this position via this budget.

School Committee members, thank you for putting your best foot forward by approving this year's school budget. I am confident that the Mayor and City Council will do the same.