

MASCONOMET REGIONAL SCHOOL COMMITTEE
Regular School Committee Meeting/State Legislator Update/Open Public Hearing
February 27, 2017

MEMBERS PRESENT: D. Volchok, Boxford, Chair T. Buono, Middleton, Vice-Chair
 C. Miller, Boxford P. Fitzsimmons, Boxford
 H. Rivers, Boxford K. Prentakis, Middleton
 A. Pascucci, Middleton L. Richards, Middleton
 K. Sherwood, Topsfield W. Hodges, Topsfield
 J. Spencer, Topsfield

MEMBERS ABSENT:

OTHERS PRESENT: K. Lyons, Superintendent S. Givens, CFO
 L. Hodgdon, HS Principal D. Flaherty, MS Principal
 W. Waters, Tri-Town Transcript Legislators, B. Hill, L. Mirra, B. Tarr, T. Speliotis, Lovely
 Students A. Rock & M. Capron Others

- A. Call To Order** –Vice-Chair T. Buono called the meeting to order at 7:10 p.m. on Wednesday, February 27, 2017 in the High School Media Center/Library. The meeting is video and audio taped.
- B. Remarks by the Chair** – D. Volchok - None
- C. Presentations of State Budget Status by Legislators** – Senators, J. Lovely, B. Tarr, Representatives B. Hill, L. Mirra, T. Speliotis
Senator B. Tarr shared a packet with the Committee for background information and indicated that the budget cycle is in the beginning stages. An update was given on revenue which is a 4% increase over last year, but still leaves a gap that the Governor will close, the state of the FY18 budget, Chapter 70 increase, and that circuit breaker will be level funded. Two recommendations were made (finding money to fund mandates and getting the federal government to provide aid in Special Education cost. Senator Lovely spoke about the Foundation Review Commission and the importance of the Superintendents’ Roundtable Sessions held every quarter. Representative Speliotis stated that they were more cautious in regard to the budget due to the uncertain times. Representatives Hill and Mirra indicated that health care cost was a worry for all. They hope that regional transportation will increase to the circuit breaker amount, but will do their best to make sure the funds are not cut in the future. Representative B. Hill indicated that contacting the MSBA to meet with Committee members would be beneficial in regard to school building assistance. K. Lyons asked if mental health cost was part of the conversation during budget discussions. Discussion was held regarding declining enrollment, the funding formula and the eventual reconciliation in this regard, declining enrollment impact, mandates, special education and regional transportation funding. Representative Hill stated that Masconomet was the only District that provided an unfunded mandate list and urged the Committee to send letters or emails to committee chairs regarding bills that are important to the District. Representative Lovely stated that she would like to speak with the Committee about a bill recently filed about sexual abuse in education.

FY 18 Budget Public Hearing – 8:20 p.m. – T. Buono gave the ground rules of public hearings, indicating that the evening is to get comments from the audience and not for Committee responses to the audience. The public comments will be summarized and the answers made into a document. Students A. Rock, grade 11 and M. Capron, grade 11 shared the history of their involvement in the school’s drama program and that they were advocating for a drama teacher. They gave their perceptions of what a drama teacher could do for the students and that they would like more students to benefit from a drama program. In response to P. Fitzsimmons’ question, they indicated that involvement in drama/chorus did give them a sense of community and that they felt very accepted and supported. They talked about the fact that most drama events were held after school which created conflicts for students who played sports or participated in extra-curricular activities and that there wasn’t anything in place for drama similar to the art or music programs.

D. Volchok received an email from a constituent and read the questions she wanted to ask the Committee as she couldn’t attend the meeting this evening.

1. The expended budget has been substantially less than the adopted budget over the last several years, resulting in a cumulative difference of approximately \$900,000. I would like to know where this money goes and what it is used for. In response - the extra money rolls into Excess & Deficiency (E. & D.), which is like the District’s free cash and can only be used to fund one-time items. Sometimes, the end of the year is negative, sometimes positive and all funds are used for education, are voted on by the Committee and the items are identified on the agenda. Having prudent funds in E & D impacts the District’s bond rating which is an asset/benefit to the towns.
2. The audit of FY15-16 reveals on page 28 that there are 2,318,418 dollars in committee/reserved funds itemized on pages 58-9, along with \$659,606 in the stabilization fund and \$1,902,454 in unassigned funds. What is the purpose of the unassigned funds?
3. There will be a warrant article for some capital expenditures on the ballot later this spring. In the past, these types of expenditures have been included in the General Fund approved and submitted by the School Committee to the Towns. Why is this changing and how are you going to reconcile the different accounting methods to the towns? I am curious to know, in particular how this will impact budget increase numbers, actual and percentage. In response to Questions 2 & 3 - S. Givens indicated that E & D and stabilization are unassigned funds. An explanation of assigned/unassigned and committed/uncommitted was given. As bigger capital items were coming up, the Committee determined that going to the towns with a warrant article was a more prudent way to fund the capital project. If approved, the towns can decide how to fund the article.

4. I have noticed that the study of capital needs has been completed and that over the next 1-5 years, there will be a \$33M+ need for improvements. How do you propose preparing for that? I response - the District is working on that and the bulk of the 35M is 10 years out, not 1-5 years. A strategic plan is being developed and discussions with the towns will be going forward.
5. I am very concerned about the high numbers in benefit costs, subsumed into the Business and Support Service line increase of \$599,943. I assume, and with insurance costs constantly increasing, the pressure doesn't look like it will abate any time soon. What is being done about this and have you investigated alternative plans, as Topsfield is currently doing? In response, a number of things have been put in place to reduce insurance cost, like reducing the District contribution (15%) and going to a GIC look-alike plan. The District continues to look at the cost. The Committee will receive information regarding the rates by Monday.

FY18 Budget Public Hearing Closed at 8:55 p.m..

School Choice Public Hearing – 8:55 p.m. – No comments from audience - Public hearing closed at 8:56 p.m.

Regular session was called to order at 8:56 p.m. by Chair D. Volchok. - D. Volchok stated that the Committee could discuss School Choice now and vote or it could be done at a later day. Discussion was held regarding the pros and cons of School Choice and the pros and cons of participating in School Choice for the next school year. A motion was made by K. Prentakis.

MOTION: To notify the Department of Education that Masconomet opts to not participate in the School Choice program for the 2017-2018.

VOTE: Motion passed.

ABSTAIN: L. Richards

H. Other Business, Old or New – None

I. Adjournment & Executive Session (Collective Bargaining Strategy: Paraprofessionals) - A motion was made by P. Fitzsimmons.

MOTION: To go into Executive Session in accordance with Chapter 30, Section 21a (3) of the General Laws for the purpose of discussing strategy with respect to collective bargaining with the Paraprofessional Association, whereas discussing this in open session might have a detrimental effect on the bargaining position of the school Committee. The Committee will not return to open session.

VOTE: Motion passed by roll call at 9:10

Submitted by: _____
Olga Langlois, Secretary

Approved: _____
Date

Per the New Open Meeting Law, the list of the documents that were either distributed to the Masconomet Regional School Committee before the meeting in a packet, or at the meeting:

1. Agenda
2. Constituent Email
3. Policy JFBB, Admission – School Choice
4. Personnel Impacts of Proposed Reductions
5. Selected Materials on State Education Funding (provided by Senator Tarr)