

**BROOKLINE SCHOOL BOARD  
DECEMBER 22, 2021  
MEETING MINUTES**

A meeting of the Brookline School Board was conducted on Wednesday, December 22, 2021, at 6:01 p.m. at the Captain Samuel Douglass Academy.

Kenneth Haag, Chairman, presided:

Members of the School Board Present: Erin Sarris, Vice Chairman  
Karen Jew, Secretary  
Rebecca Howie  
Alison Marsano (arrived at 6:22 p.m.)

Members of the School Board Absent:

Also in Attendance: Andrew Corey, Superintendent  
Brian Rater, Chairman, Brookline Finance Committee  
Cindy LaCroix, Brookline Finance Committee  
Adam Goff, Brookline Finance Committee

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**AGENDA ADJUSTMENTS**

Superintendent Corey noted the desire to discuss the lease item related to facility renovations.

**CORRESPONDENCE/RESIGNATIONS/NOMINATIONS** - None

**PUBLIC INPUT** - None

**DISCUSSION**

- FY23 Budget

Superintendent Corey noted when before the Board the prior week, he presented a budget that had been increased significantly (approx. \$150,000) to meet an unanticipated special education need the district was made aware of the Tuesday prior to the meeting. After conducting its review, the Board requested he come back with recommendations for reducing the operating budget.

The [agenda](#) packet included the list of new item requests identifying the actions taken during the four rounds of review as well as the Excel spreadsheet that identifies each line item within the budget. Superintendent Corey spoke of proposed reductions to the draft budget. Under the heading of academics, the administration determined costs associated with the reading workshop trainings and the Lucy Calkin's reading materials could be addressed through the use of Title II funds. That results in a reduction of \$7,000.

Last spring/summer a teacher was added to grade 4. Up to this point, that position was kept in the budget. If removing that from the budget, the district continues to maintain educational specifications at grade 5 next year. Should something change drastically, the district could look to the Rural Education Achievement Program (REAP) grant to fund a position if deemed necessary. That would result in a reduction of \$46,487.50.

Following last week's meeting, the administration learned that a special education student will be leaving the district prior to next year. As a result, the paraeducator associated with that student will not be needed. That would result in a reduction of \$15,915.

Also under the heading of personnel, requests had been made for two shared positions (time and cost shared by all 3 districts); SAU directed substitute and SAU directed food service substitute. The dollar amount associated with the cost sharing for the SAU directed substitute has been removed. That results in a reduction of \$11,132.

Under the heading of shared services/software, costs associated with the facilities truck and trailer will be removed from both schools. When last discussed, the question was asked of whether it would be more fiscally prudent, in the long run, to participate in the cost sharing rather than incur a cost each time the district needed to use the equipment. The SAU is considering leasing of the truck. There is concern with the ability to obtain a truck as acquiring equipment is difficult at this time. The storage container for the IT items is being removed (a different facility will be used). A slight increase was added to each budget for the IT consultant fee with the retirement of the Network Administrator. The SAU is in the final stages of hiring his replacement. Based on that hire and internal discussions, the belief is the SAU can do away with the consultant fee increases. The result is a reduction of \$30,000.

Under the heading of safety/compliance issues, removed (delayed) are the bollards for both schools and the exterior lighting at CSDA. The result is a \$16,000 reduction.

Under facilities/maintenance, removed are the gutter/storm drains at RMMS, classroom flooring for both buildings, and exterior doors at CSDA resulting in a \$44,300 reduction. That amount is being transferred into the Maintenance Trust.

Under maintenance/expendable trust, the decision was made to delay the bathrooms at RMMS. If moving forward with facilities and renovations, at some point, it may be more cost effective to put those into the next phase of the facilities project. The resulting reduction is \$50,000.

An additional review was done of special education costs and the decision reached to reduce the overall total by \$20,000.

The total proposed reduction is \$175,869.50, which results in an operating budget of \$10,429,581.50 or an increase of 4.03%.

Noted was the amount associated with the increase resulting from the BESSA contract is \$58,299.

If approved by the Board, the warrant article for the operating budget would be \$10,429,581.50, the article for the BESSA contract, year one, being \$58,299, the SAU assessment of \$407,208, Maintenance Trust at \$75,000, Special Education Trust of \$25,000, and Energy Improvements/Renovation lease cost of \$177,500 (18-year lease). The total of the warrant would be \$11,172,589 for an overall increase of \$645,277 or 6.13%. If the voters elected not to pass either of the energy warrants and did pass the traditional articles, the total increase would be \$467,777 or 4.4%.

Asked if the special education increase holds at \$569,190, Superintendent Corey stated that to be a firm number.

Chairman Haag questioned if the academic support provided this year for grade 4 has allowed for catching up with the concerns that resulted in the additional position. Superintendent Corey responded we are seeing improvement across the SAU and across every building. A data presentation will be provided to the Board in January, and the administration will follow the trend. As always happens in the spring, we will know more about the budget we already passed and if the Board states the desire to have a teacher in that position, REAP funds could be used or he may suggest exchanging a few paraprofessionals to obtain a classroom teacher. He has checked with all parties involved in the areas where reductions have been proposed, and all have supported the recommendations.

Chairman Haag questioned if there remains a line to return \$200,000 to the tax base and was told there is. Superintendent Corey stated his belief that will be achieved. At this time we need to monitor the special education costs. There is also the Unreserved Fund Balance (UFB), which is planned to be budgeted at the same amount as the current year and is another possible funding area should an additional teacher be needed.

Chairman Haag commented he wondered if that allocation should be removed from the proposed budget to reduce it further. Vice Chairman Sarris questioned the percentage difference that would result. Superintendent Corey stated he would look to the Business Administrator to provide information on that for the Public Hearing.

Brian Rater, Chairman, Brookline Finance Committee, remarked, from a taxpayer perspective, the more that can be returned to the tax base the better. He worries if the district normally gives back a certain amount and that is suddenly reduced, it is artificially reducing the percentages. It may appear better for one year, but the following year it would have a greater impact. He remarked that also serves as a buffer to address unanticipated expenses, etc. His preference would be to keep that in place and return funds to the tax base.

Superintendent Corey added in the present tax cycle, taking out the energy improvements/renovations, we gave back more because of COVID than we are asking for next year. At the end of FY21, the district returned more to the taxpayers than we are asking for in an increase for the next budget. Approx. \$537,000 was returned to the tax base. Across the entire SAU, it was \$3.2 million to offset the amount that had to be raised through taxes to support the budgets.

Chairman Haag commented on the increase in the special education cost this year noting the following year some of that should be absorbed. Superintendent Corey stated revenue from what used to be called catastrophic aid, is received to offset some of that cost (typically in July). Given the timing of receipt of those dollars (end of fiscal year), they are typically given back to the tax base.

Superintendent Corey stated in a few of the scenarios the district is working with currently, the dollar amount budgeted has to be at a certain level to kind of split the difference between a day placement (approx. \$90,000 with transportation included) and a residential placement (\$230,000-\$310,000). The budgeted amount is listed as \$160,000. Most times you do not end up with every child in a residential placement or out-of-district. The magnitude of what you need is too great not to at least budget for a significant portion of that. The budgeted amount represents known students not students who may come into the district in the next 18 months.

Vice Chairman Sarris commented the district has done such a great job of looking at the needs and experiencing cost avoidance by being able to provide services in district. She questioned if Student Services is identifying any more pervasive needs that could impact what we offer in district. Superintendent Corey stated that comes back to some of the space discussion that will occur as he believes, based on historical trends, there will be a need for in-house self-contained programming. Right now we are utilizing the services we have. There are

different needs coming in and the need to determine how we service those high-intensity needs in a better educational environment than a residential or day placement.

Finance Committee Chair Rater commented, speaking for himself, it is a tough year because of the special education increase. A four percent increase is still a bit high, 6% if considering the energy efficiency items. But at the same time, costs have gone up. We also do not want to cut back too much on the building maintenance items and the teaching position. Overall this is probably a good compromise between the various needs.

Asked for clarification of how the 5<sup>th</sup> fourth grade position was brought in, Superintendent Corey stated his recollection one position was brought in under Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) grant funding and this position was the one that was a swap for the science position.

Chairman Haag noted talking points that will have to be addressed are the proposed reductions to bring the overall increase down, the \$569,000 increase in special education costs, and the \$537,000 returned last year.

Asked what the default budget would be, Superintendent Corey stated, because of the large portion associated with the special education cost, the default budget will be very close to the proposed budget. It has not yet been finalized.

Chairman Haag commented on mention made around the belief the SAU directed food service substitute is a higher priority than the SAU directed substitute. Superintendent Corey responded the educational substitute is critical, but there is a substitute line in the budget that is funded. We do not have a substitute line for food service and food service requires a wealth of training. This directed substitute would be an SAU substitute and will allow the SAU to bring that person in and be trained.

### Facility Renovations

Superintendent Corey spoke of the discussion that occurred the prior week, work done to try to balance the overall expenses with the needs, and the belief there was the need to lower the amount being requested on the facility renovations.

The revised number is \$2,585,280. At the Richard Maghakian Memorial School (RMMS), lighting would be changed to LED lighting (\$155,610). Building controls would be updated (DDC controls) to allow for remote adjustments and gain efficiencies (\$234,910). Prioritized was gaining classroom space. The easiest way to gain 2 classrooms is to take the current library and divide it into 2 classrooms, which meets educational specifications, and move the library to the ground floor. The result would be a new library, elevator, and security office. That also requires upgrades to the ventilation on the ground floor, and approx. \$25,000 worth of new ceiling tiles. That cost would total \$1.6 million. The total at RMMS would be \$2,015,520.

At the Captain Samuel Douglass Academy (CSDA), the essentials are the boiler (\$400,000), which would require controls (only for the new boiler) (\$34,910), and the LED lighting (\$134,850). Those items result in energy savings and the potential for rebates. The total cost for CSDA is \$569,760. The total project cost (Phase I) is \$2,585,280. In the budget process, there was about \$100,000 for new furniture and equipment; however, it is believed existing furniture can be utilized. The \$100,000 was removed leaving the total cost at \$2,485,280. That equates to approx. \$175,000-\$177,000/year for an 18-year lease.

A lease is being considered as the majority of the items being addressed, e.g., boilers, lighting, boiler controls are mechanical and equipment. The lease gives the flexibility to stretch it out over a couple of years and allows us to gain some minimal amount of interest, e.g., if in year 1 we addressed the elevator and security office, approx. \$2 million would be earning money to offset the cost of the interest rate on the lease.

Also discussed was a contingency article. Should the lease be proposed and fail to pass the voters, there are certain elements that are critical and need to be done, based on compliance issues. One of those would be the elevator to meet ADA compliance. The classrooms we do have on the ground floor could not be used unless there is accessibility (cannot go outdoors to access). The contingency article would address the elevator, security office and some ventilation. The ballpark figure for those items is \$800,000 - \$900,000.

During the night of the public hearing a separate hearing will be conducted on the two lease items.

Chairman Haag remarked the lease in total is \$2.48 million, and the contingency article would be for the \$800,000 - \$900,000. He questioned if another contingency article should be proposed for \$1.6 million, which would allow for the library and additional classrooms to be completed. Superintendent Corey remarked once the elevator is in place the district could get by with the library on a cart. During COVID we had to do some things different and would make carts up of like 2<sup>nd</sup> grade library material and the librarian went to the classroom to avoid students traveling. We know we could do that for a short period of time. A library is part of the educational specifications with the State and would have to be addressed.

Finance Committee Chair Rater commented the cost per classroom of putting in an elevator and doing the lower level renovations was coming to about \$800,000 per classroom whereas the new addition costs slightly more but provides more classrooms equating to about \$500,000 per classroom. That raised the question of if adding classroom space would it be better to do the addition and then not do the elevator or renovation and perhaps utilize the space on the ground floor as storage or some other use, which may not require ADA compliance.

Superintendent Corey responded it could be looked at that way. The piece you would run into is the potential of not having it done for next year. Then you could end up with an ADA complaint. In some ways, they would know the solution is on the way, but it would still be a violation.

Finance Committee Chair Rater questioned if the ADA compliance violation would be because there is classroom space down there or because there is space down there at all and was told at some point that space will exist. When you just look at an elevator and could not use the space on the ground floor because of ventilation and those pieces, it would be a concern.

Asked if what would be gained is 4 classrooms overall, Superintendent Corey stated there would be the two classrooms created from the current library, and if doing the \$2.5 million there would be the library and a classroom space that could be used for special education.

Vice Chairman Sarris commented on her vision for a library and that she could not picture one in the space in the ground level. There would be the need for decent infrastructure and the ability to be adaptable to a media center, etc. She remarked it makes sense, and she would not want to move forward with a big project without the elevator as we want the option to use that space.

Finance Committee Chair Rater questioned if there would be the opportunity for Finance Committee and Board members to visit the space and was told that could be arranged. He reminded members that RMMS is a building that is about 60 years old. This is not a one and done kind of project, it is how do we get to meet

requirements from the view of increasing enrollment while adapting to future needs, e.g., it has a 40<sup>+</sup> year old kitchen and a gymnasium that serves as a cafeteria. At the same time, he assured members that can be remedied through phases in a relatively cost-effective way. We have proof of concept by the two schools over in Hollis that have gained another 3-4 decades of useful life through their recent projects. Their total cost was around \$7 million. Brookline started out with an estimate of \$18 million. We know that the K-5, 500 student elementary school proposed by one of our neighbors is at a cost of \$55 million.

Finance Committee Member LaCroix commented if you put in the expansion and essentially abandon the ground level you need to move the main office to Milford Street. There would remain a compliance issue were someone to come in to meet with a staff member or participate in a meeting. If abandoning the ground level, you are using it for storage completely, to get around all ADA compliance issues, and you are a single-level school.

Chairman Haag remarked he likes where it is heading. With a little bit of multi-media set-up when we renovate the space on the ground level it can be a whole other multi-purpose space. He likes the plan as presented. He spoke of the importance of addressing growth management. From a time standpoint, it appears this can be done for the next year. Superintendent Corey stated the only concern would be a supply chain issue. The elevator would have to be ordered as soon as the article passed. Once that is in, the present library to two classrooms is a relatively easy fix. He is pleased with the idea of keeping all educational services within the same horseshoe.

Finance Committee Chair Rater remarked for many years we have been talking about when the CSDA bond gets paid off, it is time to go back to RMMS and make renovations. Taking out a big bond to renovate RMMS has been in the plan for a long time now. This is the time to do it, and it is what we have been expecting.

Chairman Haag noted \$2.4 million would be presented as Phase I and asked if Phase II would be discussed at the public hearing. Superintendent Corey remarked his recommendation would be to talk to Phase I as we know the other piece, which is always a reality, is that were the economy to go south, historically Brookline and Hollis have seen enrollment decline. We are looking at likely a two-year project in Phase I. At that point, we will have an idea of whether enrollment is continuing as expected. The items on the list for Phase I are items having a life expectancy of 20 years. Items like the LED lighting and elevator are not enrollment dependent.

Chairman Haag commented the previous total was \$3.8. The \$1.4 million is still energy/efficiency items that would have a lifespan of 20 years. He suggested they look to ensure there is an understanding there are more energy/infrastructure items that are not growth dependent, but because of the age of the building.

Superintendent Corey stated another strategy could be getting through this phase and if realizing we cannot do another large bond, perhaps make the conscious decision that the maintenance trust fund will go up from \$75,000 to \$250,000, for example, every year.

Finance Committee Chair Rater questioned when Phase II would look to be funded. Superintendent Corey responded in the next biennium there is the potential for state aid to return. In order to be eligible we have to send a letter January 1, 2022. That has been sent for both CSDA and RMMS, so we have a placeholder. If that comes back, and there is the belief there is the potential for us to receive that, he would likely be looking at the 2<sup>nd</sup> year of the next biennium (2024-2025).

Chairman Haag noted, unless there was objection, the Board would move forward with the \$2.4 million article and the contingency article (\$800,000 - \$900,000).

*No objections were stated.*

The Public Hearing is scheduled for January 12, 2022.

**ADJOURNMENT**

**MOTION BY MEMBER SARRIS TO ADJOURN  
SECONDED BY MEMBER JEW  
MOTION CARRIED  
5-0-0**

*The December 22, 2021, meeting was adjourned at 6:56 p.m.*

Date \_\_\_\_\_ Signed \_\_\_\_\_