

SCHOOL COMMITTEE
Regular Meeting – February 24, 2021

A Regular Meeting of the Wayland School Committee was held remotely on Wednesday, February 24, 2021, at 5:30 P.M. broadcast by WayCAM in the Wayland Town Building.

Present and participating remotely were:

Jeanne Downs, Chair
Ellen Grieco, Vice Chair
Kim Reichelt
Chris Ryan
Kathie Steinberg

Also participating remotely:

Arthur Unobskey
Superintendent

Parry Graham
Assistant Superintendent

Richard Whitehead
Director of Student Services

Susan Bottan
Director of Finance & Operations

Also:

Ellen Tohn, Co-Chair of Energy and Climate Committee
John Harper, Associate Member of Energy and Climate Committee
Ben Keefe, Public Buildings Director

Chair Jeanne Downs convened the open session at 5:32 p.m. WayCAM recorded the meeting and it was livestreamed via ZOOM. The meeting was conducted remotely due to the COVID-19 health pandemic and according to the revised open meeting law that allows remote participation. A roll call was taken:

<u>Roll Call</u>	<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>
Jeanne Downs, Chair	X	
Ellen Grieco, Vice Chair	X	
Kim Reichelt	X	
Chris Ryan	X	
Kathie Steinberg	X	

1. Comments and Written Statements from the Public:

Jeanne read a public comment from the Curriculum Leadership Team at the Middle School in which they asked the School Committee to continue with the hybrid mode of education, given the impossible task of another logistical shift and the risk to everyone's safety. Other reasons were cited in the statement, including disruption to the most vulnerable students. The middle school staff has worked very hard to develop new schedules, mastered new technology and, via creative thinking, has built meaningful relationships. Maintaining stability in a very difficult year is extremely important, particularly with the return of MCAS and the limited time to the end of the school year.

Jeanne read a public comment from John O'Neil in which he acknowledges his support for bringing students back to school. He asked the School Committee when families can expect a definitive plan for students returning in April, particularly when the Commissioner of Education has put a forth a plan for elementary students. Mr. O'Neil described the remote challenges in his household, especially for his second grader, and his family looks forward to a plan for all-in education.

Jeanne read a public comment from Jonathan Smith in which he supports a plan to bring students back to school, but it must be done safely for the students and staff, particularly when teachers have not been prioritized to receive the vaccine. Having full classrooms with three feet of distance is not a safe environment and requested definitive evidence that it would be safe. Mr. Smith suggested deferring a decision until teachers become eligible for the vaccine.

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2. Discussion with the Energy and Climate Committee regarding Solar Array on the Loker School Roof:

Two members of the Energy and Climate Committee, Ellen Tohn and John Harper, as well as Ben Keefe came before the School Committee to discuss the proposal to put solar panels on the Loker School roof, including a possible canopy in the parking lot next summer during the roof replacement project.

During the procurement process, the town chose SOLECT Energy and is currently negotiating a non-binding letter of intent. The Board of Selectmen voted 5-0 to support putting this proposal on the town warrant. A 300 kilowatt solar array will be installed on the roof according to building codes, including the possible installation of batteries storage capacity that could bring incremental revenues to the town. The project would exceed the power needed and could reduce the amount of power needed from Eversource. John Harper described the buy-back program when there is excess power and can be exchanged for credits to apply to other bills in the town. The savings is estimated to be about \$25,000 to \$30,000 per year, but could fluctuate moving forward. The Board of Selectmen voted to support putting this proposal on the town warrant. The School Committee would then transfer control of the parking lot to the Board of Selectmen in order to install the canopy. The town is working with town counsel to draft a document in terms of transferring partial control of the building to the Board of Selectmen, as they are the board who will sign the lease.

The roof would be leased to SOLECT for 20 years, and at the end of that period, the company could remove the equipment or the town could buy the equipment at a nominal cost, as the life of the panels exceeds 20 years. The School Committee asked questions about health concerns from the panels, battery backup to avoid power outages, access to the roof in case of repairs, and care, custody, and control of the parking lot if modular classrooms are needed. In terms of funding, the vendor puts up the cash and is reimbursed over time. There are no capital or operating costs to the town.

Kathie moved that the School Committee approve the placement of solar panels on the Loker roof as part of the Loker roof replacement project as described tonight and approve the canopy panels subject to the review of the questions regarding the care, custody, and control between the Board of Selectmen and the School Committee and the School Committee approval of the warrant article. There was no second.

Upon a motion duly made by Ellen Grieco, seconded by Kathie Steinberg, the School Committee voted unanimously (5-0) to approve the solar project for the Loker School property as proposed and vote to support the warrant article to be presented at the spring town meeting. A roll call vote was taken as follows:

<u>Roll Call</u>	<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>
Jeanne Downs, Chair	X	
Ellen Grieco, Vice Chair	X	
Kim Reichelt	X	
Chris Ryan	X	
Kathie Steinberg	X	

3. Financial Matters:

(a) Review of Q2 Financial Report:

Susan presented the Q2 Financial Report that included a narrative summary and financial schedules of operating funds and grants. The total appropriated FY21 budget is \$43.3M, \$17M has been spent, \$2.4M was encumbered, leaving a projected end-year balance of \$191,000, which will be spent on students' return to school in the fall.

The remaining contractual bargaining agreements were ratified and funds were set aside to meet all contractual obligations. Due to COVID and the shift of tuition savings into SPED personnel, Susan noted that there are more staff on the payroll this year and created a shortfall of about \$40,000 in the salary reserve. The projected year-end balance of \$191,000 includes shortfalls in heating and electricity. Some of the increased spending lies in custodial costs and transitional expenses for the new superintendent, and some central office administrators leaving in June. Legal fees have increased since the last financial report, and some facilities projections have increased beyond that which was anticipated.

Special revenue fee-based programs were reduced or put on hold resulting in reduced revenue, and grants are higher this year than last year. The district received four COVID grants of about \$924,000 and approximately \$460,000 in federal funding is anticipated for FY22. Finding more savings is a work in progress.

Questions from School Committee included the lack of funds for the SPED prepay and the possibility of facilities expenses exceeding allocated funds. Rigging on the high school stage must be replaced and it assumed that funds

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would come from the capital budget, and custodial cleaning supplies, PPE, and HVAC filters were charged to the school budget but do qualify for the municipal Cares COVID grant for which Susan requested a transfer of expenses from the school budget to the town and is reflected in the Q2 Financial Report. The Town Administrator can request reimbursement through the CARES municipal fund.

(b) Update on FY22 Operating Budget:

Jeanne reported that the Finance Committee voted a draft budget and included is a \$300,000 budget reduction to the school level funded budget. The Board of Selectmen feels strongly that a \$1,000 increase in taxes per resident is unreasonable for residents at this time and would like to keep the tax increase close to 4 percent.

Susan spoke to the \$300,000 budget cut, adding that the COLA for all recently settled union and all non-union contracts needs to be calculated, and the funds allocated by the town for FY22 is short of about \$40,000 due to this year's increase in staff; Susan explained further. Susan added that more funds in the amount of \$60,000 are needed for a 27th pay period in FY22 for twelve month employees and occurs every eight years which is one more from the typical 26 pay periods. The budget cut and the shortfalls in staffing and COLA's totals \$400,000.

Prior to a conversation about the reallocation of funds, Arthur stressed the importance of the items in sustaining innovations given a very difficult year and in preparation for the needs of the students. Those asks include tech support at the elementary level, elementary guidance staff, assistant principals, and a high school social worker. The top priorities include assistant principals and a high school social worker. Arthur explained why these positions are vital.

In an attempt to recover some funds, Susan recommended the reallocation of funds in facilities and transportation. There was almost a \$439,000 increase in facilities in the areas of HVAC maintenance, contracted services, filters, and bringing up the facilities budget to be fully funded. Susan recommended that the School Committee reconsider the amount of the budget line items, resulting in a \$196,000 reduction in facilities and a savings of \$432,000 in transportation should the School Committee continue with distance transportation for a combined total of \$628,000.

Susan described the additional funding from the federal government in the "American Rescue Plan" that would issue \$130 billion to K-12 public school districts. She explained how much Wayland could potentially qualify for moving forward to FY22, but it is not known at this time how the money could be spent. The Department of Education recommends that funding is categorized in academics, SEL, and operations within COVID driven needs.

A discussion ensued about the status of COVID funding and the concern about maintaining the current transportation model for FY22. Susan added that ridership can now increase for busses provided Wayland is not a red community. Options, such as reducing the number of busses and increasing the bus fee for one year, were suggested. Additional concerns were the possibility of going below a level funded budget and the FinCom's request given the difficult financial year, as well as the increased mental health needs of the students and the unknown impact to the students, as confirmed by Richard.

The School Committee agreed to cut facilities in the school budget and maintain Tier 1 of sustaining innovations.

(c) Review of Budget Calendar, including Date for Budget Hearing:

The Budget Hearing will be scheduled on Thursday, March 11, at 7:00 p.m. Kathie asked the community to advocate for the school budget to the Finance Committee.

4. Superintendent Update:

(a) Hybrid Mode Update:

Arthur will combine his update with other topics.

5. COVID-19 Response:

(a) Discussion with Athletic Director regarding Fall 2 Season and Surveillance Testing for Athletic Participants:

Athletic Director Heath Rollins updated the School Committee on Fall 2 Season. He acknowledged all the coaches who worked tirelessly to provide a safe environment for all students to participate in athletics. He also thanked WayCAM and WSPN for live streaming the home games for parents. Heath reviewed the safety protocols followed by coaches and athletes resulting in minimal viral spread to the teams. The Fall 2 season runs through April 24 and the following sports will be played: football, girls' volleyball, cheerleading, and indoor track (as an outdoor running club) minus competitions. Spring sports begins on April 26. Heath described the snow removal process so the

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football team can play, adding that the warranty is still in effect.

A discussion ensued about surveillance testing for athletes, as it is highly encouraged by Heath. The state testing program will be extended another three weeks allowing to allow for more involvement. Mandating testing was also discussed, as well as the possibility of a team testing pool. Arthur will consult with the school attorney regarding mandating testing for athletes, student music groups, and drama.

Regarding athletic fees, Heath proposed maintaining \$300 for the football program – freshmen, JV and varsity – because although only 65% of the season is being played, the football equipment was replaced and the fee would offset those expenses. He proposed \$200 for volleyball and cheerleading and the indoor track running club at no cost.

Upon a motion duly made by Jeanne Downs, seconded by Kathie Steinberg, the School Committee voted (4-0-1) to keep the athletic fee the same for football at \$300, reduce volleyball and cheerleading to \$200, and indoor track which is the running club would be zero cost. A roll call vote was taken as follows:

<u>Roll Call</u>	<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>	<u>Abstain</u>
Jeanne Downs, Chair	X		
Ellen Grieco, Vice Chair			X
Kim Reichelt	X		
Chris Ryan	X		
Kathie Steinberg	X		

(b) Surveillance Testing Program Update:

Out of 62 pools last week, 47 were negative and 15 were invalid due to issues around the collection process. The principals were instrumental in coming up with a system, and all the volunteers and staff led by Lisa Rafferty and Sejal Sirinivisan also worked on the logistics and process as well. Friday, February 26, will be the next round of testing. About 40% of the school population is being tested, and Arthur and Ellen encouraged more participation. Given the three week extension of testing, the consent period will also be extended. Ellen described the testing donation program for which the funds will be used to test staff and for families in need.

(c) Vaccination Update:

Vaccines will not be provided to the local health departments by the state. Wayland could become part of a consortium with other towns for the purpose of vaccinating the community and town and school staff.

(d) Discussion and Review of Planning for Remainder of School Year, including Synchronous Augmentation, Kindergarten All-In Update and Grades 1-12 All-In Planning:

Given all the work done by teachers, principals, curriculum directors, facilities, and Susan, the schools are ready for the Kindergartners. The bus routes have been adjusted as well.

Planning for the remainder of the school year, including Grades 1 through 12:

Dr. Joseph Allen, Director of the Healthy Buildings Program and professor at Harvard’s Chan School of Public Health, will speak about running healthy building during this COVID environment at the March 3 School Committee meeting. He consults with many districts around risk mitigation procedures, such as social distancing and ventilation.

Arthur updated the School Committee regarding a virtual meeting with the Commissioner of Education and district superintendents. The Commissioner is going to ask the Board of Education within the next two weeks for authority to eliminate the hybrid model and remote model as vehicles to deliver instruction to the students, as well as moving up the date to which they would no longer serve as recognized learning for students. Therefore, in-person learning would be the only option for students to received education; however, WRAP could continue. Elementary would return in person the first week of April and dates for middle and high school students would be determined soon thereafter.

The School Committee expressed their concerns about the decision making process being taken away from the districts, it undermines the efforts of everyone this year, the possible expansion of WRAP, and the lack of a vaccination program for teachers and staff. The administrators also commented on the Commissioner’s plan in terms of the timing, the extreme difficulty in the shift for staff, the need for more guidance and guidelines, and “one size does not fit all.”

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Arthur presented a possible approach to bringing students in grades 1 to 12 all-in this spring. Surveys were administered to families and building based staff in which there were five questions about the best way to serve the needs of the students through the end of the year, health and safety considerations if the distance threshold is lowered, logistical challenges, budgetary implications, and DESE's directive in bringing students all-in which currently is not definitive. Over 2,000 parents and over 300 staff responded to the survey.

About 20% of parents strongly believe that it would be academically and socially and emotionally beneficial to bring the students back to school 4-5 days a week and the percentage of parents by grade level was provided. A high percentage of parents, higher in the elementary grades, are concerned about their child's and their families' safety if the distance threshold was lessened. However, for most parents, the benefits do outweigh the concerns.

Likewise, Arthur presented the staff's response with a large number agreeing that it would be beneficial academically and socially and emotionally to bring students all-in, particularly in the elementary grades. However, the staff strongly agree across all levels that there are safety concerns, especially if social distancing is lowered. Staff is also very concerned about their families and about 60% strongly disagree that the benefits outweigh the concerns. Staff were also asked about the vaccines for teachers and staff and strongly agree at all grade levels that they should be vaccinated before bringing students all-in.

In terms of financial implications in Option 1 with a April 26 start date, 4 or 5 days a week and lunch provided, there are different costs for grade levels: Grades 1-5 (\$173,000-\$188,000), Grades 6-8 (\$139,000), and Grades 9-12 (\$87,000). Susan reviewed the costs and are based on 3 feet of distance in the classroom and 6 feet in the cafeteria. Susan did the same review of costs for Option 2, 5 days a week but shortened days, and no lunch provided. Costs are as follows: Grades 1-5 (\$89,000-\$104,000), Grades 6-8 (\$104,200), and Grades 9-12 (\$33,000).

The administrators reviewed possible summer programming that included an individualized extended school year for student services which will be in session for up to five weeks focusing on reading and math and specialized programs. Some younger students may attend Pegasus. Other anticipated summer programming include a two-week program in August for about 100 rising 1st through 5th graders who are below grade level in reading and math. In addition, there may be a two-week program in July for students, including a social emotional component. There may be summer programs for Spanish Immersion and elementary and middle school band and strings as well. Finally, there could be 15 hours of teacher-led programming for middle and high school students that will be identified by need for those students.

The School Committee asked questions about funding the summer programs, especially if funds are needed for the students to come back all-in during April this year. A discussion followed in this regard. Two of the COVID grants can be spent through the FY22 fiscal year; however, Susan has designated those funds to be spent this fiscal year.

Some districts are currently operating at three to six feet and Arthur spoke about Needham's school plan when they brought the Kindergarten through grade two students into school four days a week. King Philip Regional for grades 7-12 has been at a minimum of three feet since October and has noted very limited spread in the building but acknowledges that contact tracing is more challenging and results in larger quarantine numbers.

Next steps are to observe the implementation of the kindergarten model, survey families on possible shifts to WRAP, implement surveillance pooled testing, support the development of a vaccination plan, continue auditing health and safety protocols, monitor COVID rates in the district, and possibly make a decision by March 10 depending on DESE's announcement. A discussion followed in terms of planning in light of a forthcoming possible mandate by the state.

- (e) Discussion of Travel Policy:
Passed over.
- (f) Special Education Update:
Passed over.
- (g) Ongoing Review Groups: Remote and Hybrid Learning Progress Committee and COVID Learning and Safety Committee:
Passed over.

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- (h) Transportation Update:
On February 11, DESE has eliminated the threshold restrictions on busses.
- (i) Ventilation Update:
Passed over.
- (j) Next Steps:
Passed over.

6. **Consent Agenda:**

- (a) Approval of Minutes: January 27, 2021, January 29, 2021, February 1, 2021, and February 16, 2021:
Upon a motion duly made by Kim Reichelt, seconded by Kathie Steinberg, the School Committee voted unanimously (5-0) to approve the consent agenda. A roll call vote was taken as follows:

<u>Roll Call</u>	<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>
Jeanne Downs, Chair	X	
Ellen Grieco, Vice Chair	X	
Kim Reichelt	X	
Chris Ryan	X	
Kathie Steinberg	X	

7. **Administrative/Procedural Matters:**

- (a) Discussion of Upcoming Meeting Schedule:
This was discussed earlier in the meeting.
- (b) Discussion of Search Process for Business Administrator/Director of Finance and Operations:
A copy of the current job description is not available, so Susan will edit the previous job description to reflect her current role and tasks. She will send the updated job description to the School Committee.

8. **Matters not Reasonably Anticipated by the Chair:**

The Custodial, Food Service and WESA Memorandums of Agreement were ratified this week. Parry thanked the WESA bargaining team and Arthur thanked the Custodial and Food Service bargaining teams.

9. **Executive Session:**

Upon a motion duly made by Jeanne Downs, seconded by Kim Reichelt, the School Committee voted unanimously (5-0) to enter Executive Session at 9:45 p.m. for the purposes of (a) discussing strategy related to negotiations with non-union personnel, the incoming Superintendent and the outgoing Superintendent, as permitted by M.G.L. c.30A, §21(a)(2), as a discussion in open session may have a detrimental effect on the negotiating position of the School Committee; and (b) the approval of the following executive session minutes, as permitted by M.G.L. c.30A, §22: January 27, 2021, January 29, 2021, and February 16, 2021. The February 16, 2021 minutes will be passed over.

The School Committee will adjourn in Executive Session and will not reconvene in open session. A roll call vote was taken as follows:

<u>Roll Call</u>	<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>
Jeanne Downs, Chair	X	
Ellen Grieco, Vice Chair	X	
Kim Reichelt	X	
Chris Ryan	X	
Kathie Steinberg	X	

10. **Adjournment:**

Upon a motion duly made by Jeanne Downs, seconded by Chris Ryan, the School Committee voted unanimously (5-0) to adjourn at 10:10 p.m. A roll call vote was taken as follows:

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<u>Roll Call</u>	<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>
Jeanne Downs, Chair	X	
Ellen Grieco, Vice Chair	X	
Kim Reichelt	X	
Chris Ryan	X	
Kathie Steinberg	X	

Respectfully submitted,

Arthur Unobskey, Clerk
Wayland School Committee

Corresponding Documentation:

1. Agenda
2. Public Comment
3. Article T – Loker Solar Agreement
4. FY21 Q2 Financial Report
5. FY21 Q2 Financial Report Summary
6. FY22 Budget Voted by School Committee
7. FY22 Finance Committee Budget Review
8. Minutes of January 27, 2021
9. Minutes of January 29, 2021
10. Minutes of February 1, 2021
11. Executive Session Motion