

GATEWAY REGIONAL DISTRICT SCHOOL COMMITTEE

PUBLIC HEARING MINUTES

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 2, 2016

**Gateway Performing Arts Center
7:00 P.M.**

I. OPENING OF MEETING

BLANDFORD

Michele Crane
Terri Garfield

CHESTER

Shirley Winer
Martha Otterbeck
Diane Dunn

HUNTINGTON

William Hathaway
Jeff Wyand

MIDDLEFIELD

Sarah Foley

MONTGOMERY

Anne-Marie Buikus
Madelyn Austin

RUSSELL

Tara Balboni

SECRETARY

Stacy Stewart

CENTRAL ADMINISTRATION

Dr. David B. Hopson, Superintendent
Stephanie Fisk, Business & Finance

ADMINISTRATIVE COUNCIL

Joanne Blocker, Director of Academics
Megan Coburn, Chs,Lit,Ms Principal
Jason Finnie, High/Jr. High Principal
Sara Laing, Chs,Lit, Ms Assistant Principal
Wendy Long, District Grant Writer
Anthony Sabonis, High/Jr. High Assistant Principal
Alice Taverna, Pupil Services Director

STUDENT REPRESENTATIVES

OTHERS: _____

7:05 p.m. II. PUBLIC HEARING – FY '17 Budget

- Dr. Hopson opened the meeting at 7:00 p.m. He gave a brief PowerPoint presentation over viewing the budget. Assessments range from -6.61 Montgomery to +5.42 Middlefield. There is an overall decrease of \$426,534 or -2.61%
- Action to be taken for is for everyone to send a letter and/ or call the state. If regional transportation went to 85% reimbursement it would negate increase in town assessment.
- Changes being made: reconfigure grades PreK-5, Middle school 6-8, and High School 9-12. Changing hours; buildings closing at 9p.m. instead of 10 p.m. 1.2 administrative positions being cut and tasks are being spread over fewer people.
- Next steps: school committee adopts budget in the next two weeks, House numbers hopefully in before the first town meeting, Senate numbers and town meetings, and state budget adopted.
- Dr. Hopson said Blandford and Huntington have indicated what they can afford. He asked what can the towns stretch and reach to pay. He would like the towns to talk to their school committee members or talk to him or Ms. Fisk.
- Dr. Hopson said to get to where we are today, we subtracted mitigation and then increased 2.5%. If we received 85% in regional the assessments will be where they were last year.
- Mr. Renauld asked if it was before mitigation or after the state set the budget.
- Dr. Hopson said after the state set the budget.
- Jim Duggan read a statement regarding the budget under consideration. The state promised reimbursement, and then didn't follow through, then they let Worthington out. The state and schools need to work together. His statement was in support of the school district and teachers.

- Andy Montanero talked about the unfunded mandate. Attorney Lampke said we should hold on the \$630,000 mitigation money. Is there any reason why we shouldn't file for 85% transportation reimbursement?
- Dr. Hopson said it maybe not, except with the wording that the legislature makes the final decision on funding, we probably won't get anything.
- Mrs. Otterbeck asked what is the impact of the governor's position of charter schools?
- Dr. Hopson said it will impact us to some degree but not as much as some schools. Charter schools were put in to do things for students that didn't quite fit into public schools. They were trying to find new means to reach those students. They are taking students from public schools.
- Bill Brown said charter schools don't have a school committee and they have a much more limited obligation to report what is going on in them. There is less say in the education of those children.
- Jim Duggan said they don't play by the rules set out initially. They are supposed to reflect the demographics to the region they are in and they don't necessarily do that.
- Mrs. McVeigh said a Gateway sustainability taskforce has been formed. There are Community Compact Grants the towns are signing up for. The push is for regionalization and shared services. We need to discuss a way forward to share costs, and services. The fastest growing population is the elderly and we are paying squat for our elderly. She would encourage school committee to get actively involved in determining the future of our district. School committee should be as proactive as the towns are trying to be.
- Dr. Hopson said we are just about ready to send out the RFP for the consultant. There is a push to get small school districts under 1,000 students to form a group to lobby.
- Andy Myers said at the last GTAC he recommended gateway level fund from last year. We are in a crisis. Chester had a \$100,000 increase. Tax rate up to \$21.13. Housing rates are going up, but values are going down. We can save hundreds of thousands of dollars if we pull together. We can't continue to lose students. His recommendation to hold fast.
- Dr. Hopson clarified Andy Myers means level fund the assessments. To reach his it is another quarter of a million dollars.
- Andy Myers said they want Gateway to do what they are doing: look at restructuring and sharing costs and services.
- Dr. Hopson said we never get credit for cutting a million dollars over the past two years. Cutting another quarter of a million will reduce course offerings. Maybe we will get some answers from the sustainability group, consultant, and the small schools group. The district is not going to cut our way out of this problem. There aren't many commercial entities coming in nor are the towns encouraging commercial entities.
- Andy Myers said the good news is that we can make this happen we can be a leader by brainstorming how to attract businesses.
- Dr. Hopson asked again for the towns to let us know what they can afford.
- Andy Myers suggested at GTAC the rolling average, can we take a look at that and see what those numbers are.
- Mike Crochiere is speaking as a Chester finance member and a parent. He would like to see the services maintained not cut. That is one of the reasons that Worthington left. Also, the lack of house sales is because of no high speed internet. We have a level I high school. He doesn't want to see more cuts. He would like to see more online courses offered.
- Darlene McVeigh said when the letter was read to the school committee from Huntington and Blandford they asked to look at other revenue streams. We aren't asking you to make more cuts. She can't stand up at town meeting and ask for another \$1.28 tax increase again next year. Look at school choice and the money and OPEB. We do have a lot of centers of excellence. Not one town official was asking for a cut, but to look at other areas instead.
- Mrs. Winer said we've talked about this in the past during tight times. One of the things we talked about was school scheduling changes. We could have saved money if we did it cleverly, but the state wouldn't allow us to do it.
- Dr. Hopson said we've used less E & D. It's the same percentage, but the amount of money has been less. We could level fund assessments for two years, but then there won't be any money left. Are the towns going to be able to afford \$800,000 in three or four years. It is not whether we can, it is how long can we.
- Darlene McVeigh said we are heavily invested in our schools. School Committee needs to get active with other school committees. We need to get ahead of the curve. All they asked was to cut assessment by a little over \$29,000, that's finding an additional \$104,000.

- Darlene McVeigh would ask school committee to approve that at the next meeting. We need to get every tax payer to inundate the legislature for 85% in transportation reimbursement. You can find it in the OPEB trust fund.
- Dr. Hopson said is it 2.5 over what you spend He doesn't think 0% is reasonable. When we get the house numbers school committee should look at how we can get to 2.5%.
- Andy Myers said the issue isn't this year's or next year's budget. The issue is we are in a downward spiral. We need to tackle a decrease in population.
- Edward Renauld of Huntington said the revenue issues are real in these small towns. We tried to putforward the override last year and it didn't even come close. They got the town to raise and appropriate up to almost the dollar. This year we won't have the \$630,000 mitigation money. When DESE came in and set 12th, they approved the budget that the towns said they couldn't afford. There are more issues with people paying their taxes. The amount of money that goes to education is 65% of Huntington's budget.
- Barbara Huntoon asked where do you see the consultant fit into this.
- Dr. Hopson said we are asking the consultant to meet with the schools and the towns. Looking at sharing central office etc. Are there things we can do that will enhance services and save money?
- Dr. Hopson thinks it is a great thing. There is another school district that we are looking at sharing a business manager with, but it isn't that clear cut. All of western Massachusetts is having a decrease in student population.

XIV. ADJOURNMENT 8:04 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,
Stacy L Stewart
School Committee Secretary