

**COMMITTEE ON FINANCE,  
SITTING AS A COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE  
MAY 31, 2018 AT 6:00 PM  
CITY COUNCIL CHAMBERS  
WOBURN CITY HALL**

Voting Members:

Attending: Chair Michael Concannon, Alderman Michael Anderson, Alderman Mark Gaffney  
Alderman Richard Gately, Alderman Lindsay Higgins, Alderman Darlene Mercer-Bruen,  
Alderman Edward Tedesco, Alderman Joanne Campbell, and President Richard Haggerty

Absent: None

Chairman Concannon thanked the attendees for their flexibility with scheduling. He said the City Council's public hearing on the budget will be held on Monday, June 11, and that the council is meeting with all the city's department heads before then.

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**Woburn Public Schools** – Appearing were Supt. Dr. Matthew Crowley, Asst. Supt. for Finance & Operations Joseph Elia, interim Asst. Supt. for Curriculum & Instruction Wendy Sprague, and School Committee Chairman Joseph Demers. Chairman Concannon acknowledged he has a relative who is employed by the School Dept. He said he has consulted with the state Ethics Commission and was told he could participate in the discussion of the school budget but would have to abstain from voting on any page of the budget on which his relative's name appears. Alderman Higgins and Alderman Tedesco both acknowledged they also have relatives employed by the School Dept. and would be following the same guidelines as Chairman Concannon. Chairman Demers offered literature entitled "Woburn Public Schools Fiscal Year 2019 Budget." Motion made by Alderman Mercer-Bruen and seconded by Alderman Tedesco to accept the aforementioned document and make it part of the permanent record; approved, 9-0. Chairman Demers said this year the School Dept. and School Committee opted to take a historical look at the budget and consider 3-year budget trends. Chairman Demers said the FY '19 budget is a needs-based budget that addresses only what needs to be addressed. Dr. Crowley gave an overview of all the good things that are happening just this week in the Woburn Public Schools system. He said a state championship was won in track, a kindergartener read for the first time at the Reeves Elementary School, there were performing arts exhibitions at the middle schools, Woburn High seniors were awarded more than \$300,000 in scholarships and there was a day of service for seniors at their respective former elementary schools. He said approximately 340 seniors will graduate from Woburn High on Sunday and a great majority of them are 12-year products of the Woburn Public School system. He said participants in the Best Buddies program will compete in a football tournament at Harvard on Friday. Dr. Crowley said the examination of the budget wasn't a completely zero-based approach, since there are certain costs that are accrued annually. Dr. Crowley said on January 23 there was a forum with Dr. Bill Daggett of the International Center for Leadership in Education as the keynote speaker, followed by breakout sessions, some of which included students. The goal was to identify priorities, according to Dr. Crowley. He said the School Dept. looked at 3-year budget trends in order to determine if there are ways to allocate funding differently. He said it was healthy to look at the budget differently.

He said retirements were considered when looking at filling positions and whether the positions were really needed. He said some positions will be consolidated with the merger of the Hurld and Wyman schools. He said on January 31, Mayor Galvin told the School Dept. to limit the budget increase to 3.5 percent. Dr. Crowley said school officials worked backwards and presented to the mayor a budget with a 3.4998 percent increase, with a variance of \$17. Referring to the handout distributed by Chairman Demers, Dr. Crowley said a focus of the FY '19 budget will be fulfilling social and emotional needs of students, and that staff has been working for three years to align curriculum both horizontally and vertically. He said the key to accommodating social and emotional needs is adjustment counselors whose role is to diffuse traumatic situations. He said he would like to have six adjustment counselors so every school can have one. He said he would like to also like to have a district-wide Board Certified Behavioral Analyst whose role is to create behavioral intervention plans. He said he would like a therapeutic program coordinator and a social worker to aid the high needs students at the high school. Dr. Crowley said the hope is that the curriculum coordinators would be hired internally. He said another priority is an assistant principal at the Hurld/Wyman to support the teachers at the new school. Additional priorities include a human resources director, an assistant superintendent of student services and a part-time truant officer. He said he, Asst. Supt. Sprague and Asst. Supt. Elia do their best they can with personnel matters but they are not human resources professionals. Dr. Crowley said the number one request of the Woburn Teachers Association is a human resources director. He said if students are absent more than 10 percent of the time, it counts against the school. Dr. Crowley said it was a team effort to identify priorities. He said a goal was to not touch bus fees, and there are no user or athletics fees, and there is free full day kindergarten. Alderman Gately cited the new positions and asked if the School Dept. is moving people around. Dr. Crowley said there is a net gain of two positions. Alderman Gately asked why \$6,000 for educational supplies was removed from every school budget. Asst. Supt. Elia said spending levels over the last three years were taken into consideration when those cuts were made. Alderman Gately asked if the schools will still be adequately supplied. Asst. Supt. Elia said they will be. Alderman Gately noted every school lost the same amount of money for supplies, no matter how many students there are. Alderman Gately said maintenance was reduced by \$200,000. Asst. Supt. Elia said the thought is a human resources director was a critical need. Alderman Gately asked about the conditions of the roofs at the schools. Asst. Supt. Elia said the roof at the Joyce Middle School was done last summer. Alderman Gately asked how many students will graduate on Sunday. Dr. Crowley said there will be 340 graduates. Alderman Gately asked why the line item for substitute teachers dropped by about \$60,000. Alderman Gately asked what the pay is for a substitute teacher. Asst. Supt. Elia said the daily pay is \$90. Alderman Gately said there seems to be a trend that the number of students is dropping. Asst. Supt. Elia said with the new residential units coming on line, he thinks the trend of declining enrollment is going to stop. Alderman Tedesco thanked Dr. Crowley for the update on current events in the schools and added there was also the release of the annual lip-dub video. Alderman Tedesco thanked the school officials for taking a creative approach to the budget, calling it a 21<sup>st</sup> century budget for 21<sup>st</sup> century education. Alderman Tedesco asked what the plan is to replace the turf field at the high school. Asst. Supt. Elia said the field should last another one or two years. Alderman Tedesco asked how much replacing the turf field will cost. Asst. Supt. Elia said the new turf will cost \$1 million-\$1.2 million. Alderman Tedesco said he thinks more departments should be trying to do a zero-based, 3-year approach to the budget. Alderman Mercer-Bruen said she loved the lip-dub video. She said she has received calls about problems

with the turf at the Goodyear School, which she said has still not been repaired. She said the first call came in August and asked if someone could address it. Chairman Demers said he would have the School Committee's Resource Subcommittee look at that issue. Alderman Mercer-Bruen asked how the School Dept. handles human resources issues now. Asst. Supt. Elia joked they are handled with a Ouija board. Alderman Mercer-Bruen said she does not know how they take on that additional responsibility, because the School Dept. is operating a mini-city. She said the cut in school supplies is a concern because those costs are made up by the parents. Asst. Supt. Elia said the School Dept. looked at trends and the cost of supplies is going down, particularly because paper isn't being used as much. Alderman Mercer-Bruen said nevertheless students are going to need supplies and parents are going to pay for it. She said one of her daughters was assigned a project to build an atom and it cost her \$80 in supplies. President Haggerty joked he thought atoms were supposed to be small. Alderman Anderson said he was impressed with the School Dept.'s budget. He said the only part he finds confusing is that only two positions are being added. He asked if the other positions are being vacated due to retirements. Asst. Supt. Elia said there are retirements and resignations. Chairman Demers said the curriculum coordinators will take the place of the traditional department heads. Alderman Anderson said the budget has his support as long as the net gain is only two positions. President Haggerty asked if there are any other imminent infrastructure needs. Asst. Supt. Elia said there needs to be work done to the field house at the Joyce Middle School and the next roof to be overhauled is at the Altavesta Elementary School. President Haggerty said the front of the rink to the O'Brien Rink looks rough right now. Asst. Supt. Elia said he will talk to the mayor but he thinks the city is responsible for the maintenance in front of the rink. President Haggerty said he supports the new positions, as long as the number of teachers at the new Hurld/Wyman School is decreasing. Dr. Crowley said it is. President Haggerty asked about the current student/teacher ratio. Asst. Supt. Sprague said it is about 18-20 per teacher. President Haggerty asked if the administration has started contract negotiations with the teachers. Dr. Crowley said negotiations have started. President Haggerty asked what the two biggest challenges facing the school department are. Dr. Crowley replied number one is social and emotional issues, and number two is maintaining strong instructional support for teachers. He said being a teacher is a tough job. President Haggerty thanked the school officials in attendance for their continued good relationship with the City Council. Alderman Higgins thanked the School Dept. for taking a creative look at the budget, noting it is the biggest departmental budget in the city. She said she appreciates the initiative that went toward looking at the budget creatively. Alderman Higgins said the city's human resources director has indicated she would prefer the schools to have their own HRD. She said the state's new policy on absenteeism is unfortunate because the rules were changed. Asst. Supt. Elia agreed the rules were changed after the game was started. Alderman Higgins said she thinks hiring a part-time truant officer would be helpful. Alderman Campbell said the figures indicate substitute teachers work 600-plus days. Asst. Supt. Elia said the human resources director will be looking at vacation time during the school year and whether there's a need to have a substitute teacher cover every absence. Dr. Crowley said the School Dept. is struggling to find substitute teachers. He said there are some days they can't find people and that is reflected in the budget. Alderman Gaffney thanked the school officials and said the school system in Woburn is wonderful, because of all they do. Chairman Concannon said he attended Dr. Daggett's presentation and if offered a new perspective on education. He said the concept of preparing students for jobs that don't exist yet was eye-opening. He said everyone at the forum was energized. Chairman Concannon said he is the council's liaison to the School Committee

and he attends the meetings, and that it was good to see things in the budget that people said they needed. Chairman Concannon the next item on the Finance Committee's agenda is the Northeast Regional Metropolitan Vocational High School's budget and he went over there to talk about how the curriculum fits with the Woburn Public Schools' curriculum. He said he was pleased to hear the people at the Voke understand their role and how it fits together. He said the issue of complementary education will probably come to a head as the process to build a new school begins. He said at that point Woburn will have a conversation about how much the city is willing to contribute and what it would like to see. He said the message for the Voke is it needs to be complementary versus competitive. Alderman Gately asked Asst. Supt. Elia if this is his last budget. Asst. Supt. Elia said he has one more budget to present. Alderman Gately said he came off pretty hard on the School Dept.'s budget, but he thinks the schools are running in the right direction with their emphasis on emotional support. He said that was something that was never seen in the schools before, but now the schools have to be geared up for it. He said he thinks the teachers in Woburn are the best, and that they work long and hard. He said the city has to allocate enough money to maintain the schools, because if the schools start to deteriorate, it causes more expensive problems. Alderman Gately said he will support the school budget, but he hopes next time more consideration is given to maintenance.

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**Northeast Regional Metropolitan Vocational High School** - Appearing were Superintendent-Director David DiBarri, Finance Director Jay Picone and School Committee Chairman Deborah Davis, who is also Woburn's elected representative to the Northeast Voke School Committee. Chairman Concannon said he thinks it is a good idea. Chairman Davis said there were 47 members of the Class of 2017 at Northeast Voke named to the National Technical Honor Society, and 31 were named to the National Honor Society. She said students earned \$35,000 in scholarships, much of which went to pay for purchasing tools and equipment for jobs in the students' various trades. She said 90 students went on to attend 4-year colleges and 65 students attended 2-year colleges. She said 114 students went directly into employment and eight went into the military. There was no response from 20 students about their post-graduate plans. She said the pass rate for MCAS was 99.7 percent, a remarkable number since 10<sup>th</sup> graders only receive 1.5 years of instruction in their first two years at the voke. she said Northeast Voke does an excellent job of educating the students both academically and educationally. Director DiBarri said Northeast Voke shares values with the Woburn Public Schools system in that a growing emphasis is placed on meeting the social and emotional needs of students before there is an outburst. He said the Voke has one of the highest daily attendance rates in the state in part because the school brought in a part-time truant officer two years ago. He said more than 100 students at the school are from Woburn and the city has always been a big part of Northeast Voke over the decades. He said 68 students received Abigail Adams scholarships. He said there are 150 students in paid co-op programs and graduates are walking out of school and into paid jobs. Director DiBarri said more 17 percent of Northeast Voke students are ESL students and 22 percent are on an IEP, and when you add the students who are on a 504 plan, the number of students who require accommodations jumps to 33 percent. He said 51 percent of the students are classified as high-needs students. Director DiBarri said the dropout rate is less than 1/10<sup>th</sup> of 1 percent. He said the school provides programs that allow graduates to walk into entry level jobs, and one of the goals is to get students into trades so they can make a lot of money and go

back to their respective towns. He said there has been an increase in emphasis on the robotics and automation program because there are more entry-level jobs available. He said there are now more companies who want kids coming out of the Voke to work for them. He said when Woburn built a new high school, it was scary for the Northeast Voke administration, but it worked out and the team approach with Woburn Public Schools is working. Director Picone said the goal of the budget is two-fold – the first being a minimal financial impact on the communities. He said the administration understands a major increase in the assessment is problematic. He said the goal was to limit the budget increase to 3 percent in spite of operational costs the school did not have in FY '18. Director Picone said the funding mechanism is based on Chapter 70 funds from the state, assessments and transportation reimbursements. Director Picone said Northeast Voke has been invited by the Mass. School Building Authority to submit an application for a new school. He said there needs to be money put aside for a feasibility study, and thus far \$1 million has been put into reserve. He said the money in the reserve account does not affect the assessment. Alderman Tedesco asked if the capital project line item is the same as the one that was passed earlier in the year. Director DiBarri said it is not. Director Picone said the total increase in the budget is \$1,831,804, with about \$500,000 of that going toward contractual salary obligations. He said there is an increase of \$336,117 in Woburn's assessment. President Haggerty said he thinks Northeast Voke does a terrific job and said it is time for a new school building. Director DiBarri said the administration has been planning for a new school for a few years. He said Northeast Voke is officially invited into the MSBA school building process tomorrow. He said the administration will have 270 days to get an application together than he expects an architect will be hired in August of 2019. Director DiBarri said he expects the administration won't have to come back to the member communities for approval until 2021, and that the new school will be opened in 2024, at the earliest, and at that point Woburn would be expected to begin paying for the project. President Haggerty asked if the city will have to cut a check for approximately \$5 million at that time. Director DiBarri said the reimbursement rate from MSBA may be around 72-73 percent and the remainder will be divided by per pupil enrollment with a 30-year bond. He said a new school is preferable over capital improvements because the latter is not reimbursable. Chairman Davis said the new building is expected to cost \$200 and with an approximate 75 percent reimbursement, the district will be looking for about \$50 million from the cities and towns. She said an architect determined the present building would require about \$55 million in renovations, without accounting for unforeseen circumstances, and that makes building a new school almost a no-brainer. President Haggerty asked where the new school will be located. Director DiBarri said the game plan is to build where Walsh Field is now, heading up toward Landrigan Field. He said the administration looked at three options and is still open to other ideas. He said they definitely have enough land upon which to build a new school. Chairman Davis said the athletic fields will be relocated to the site of the current building. She said the administration does not want to disturb the current building during construction. Alderman Higgins asked if the new school will last beyond the term of the 30-year bond. Director DiBarri said the new school will be designed to last 50 years. Alderman Gately said he hopes Northeast Voke gets funding for a new building. He said having enough land to build the new building while the old building is still in use is a huge plus. Alderman Gately said everything the folks at Northeast Voke do is amazing. He said he has worked with Northeast Voke graduates and they have been a bunch of smart, hard-working kids. He said the only thing that concerns the city of Woburn is how the assessment is calculated because Woburn pays three times as much as Chelsea. Director DiBarri said Chelsea is paying a

similar rate to Woburn for their students. He said every community pays Northeast the same but the variable is how much the state subsidizes each community. Chairman Davis said the calculation of the assessments has always been a big concern and there is a constant fight for fair and equitable funding. She said she has been on the Northeast Voke School Committee for 21 years and still hasn't heard an explanation of the funding formula that makes sense. She said just because Woburn is fiscally-responsible doesn't mean it should pay more than other towns. Chairman Concannon said he is very appreciative of the way Northeast Voke does not want to be in competition with Woburn High. He said he is asked frequently if the city is getting the best bang for its buck at Northeast Voke. He said every year there are parents of students who request placement at Minuteman Tech and the goal is to get them to get the programs they need at Northeast Voke. He said he wants Woburn students to get the classes they need so they don't end up at Minuteman Tech or Essex Aggie. Director DiBarri said the administration meets with students whose first choice isn't Northeast Voke and they end up being happy they went there after all. Chairman Davis said there is a misconception about Minuteman Tech. She said most of the students who want to attend Minuteman Tech do so because it is closer, but once they come to Northeast Voke, they are pleasantly surprised because it blows away Minuteman Tech. Chairman Concannon noted it costs a lot more to send a student to Minuteman Tech than Northeast Voke. Chairman Davis said there is no reason for a student to attend Minuteman Tech if the same program is offered at Northeast Voke. She said Minuteman Tech is trying to stay afloat and number of member communities have bailed on them, so they are trying to recruit. She said until a student sets foot in Northeast Voke, they should not talk about attending Minuteman Tech. Chairman Concannon said Woburn is committed to Northeast Voke and if the city wants to leave, it would basically have to buy its way out. Director DiBarri said the only way a member community can leave the district is with a unanimous vote from the other communities, and then the departing community has to pay back the bond. He said it's really not a good scenario. Chairman Davis said the bill for the new building is divided by the number of pupils, not by the formula. She said Chelsea has about 200 students at Northeast Voke. Director DiBarri said Woburn's students comprise almost exactly 1/12<sup>th</sup> of the population at Northeast Voke. Alderman Mercer-Bruen said the city has control and can put an end to kids going to Minuteman Tech. Chairman Concannon said the Woburn Public Schools are taking a stricter approach about allowing students to go to Minuteman Tech. Director DiBarri said no freshman can go to Minuteman Tech unless they enroll in the agricultural program. He said otherwise students have to go to Northeast Voke's exploratory program as freshmen. Chairman Concannon said the fourth and final budget session will be held on Thursday, June 7. He said the meeting will be held in the Committee Room, because there is a presentation about the proposed development at the Woburn Mall in the Council Chamber that night. Alderman Mercer-Bruen said she will be attending the Woburn Mall forum. Chairman Concannon said the public hearing on the budget will be held on Monday, June 11.

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Motion made by Alderman Tedesco and seconded by Alderman Mercer-Bruen that the meeting be ADJOURNED, all in favor, 9-0. Chairman Concannon adjourned the meeting at 7:55 p.m.

Attest: \_\_\_\_\_  
Gordon Vincent  
Clerk of Committees