CALL TO ORDER

Ms. Crossman called the meeting to order at 7:00 PM.

REVIEW AND APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Ms. Crossman requested to amend the minutes of February 15, 2022 to reflect the following: The February 1, 2022 minutes were approved with 7 yes, 0 no, and 1 abstention by Mr. Chaprales. Mr. Chaprales moved to approve the February 15, 2022 minutes as amended. Mr. Collupy seconded. The minutes were approved with 8 yes, 0 no, and 1 abstention by Mr. Meomartino.

CORRESPONDENCE/STATEMENTS/ANNOUNCEMENTS

TOWN MANAGER REPORT

1. Mr. Dunham thanked Ms. Harper for addressing the room technology issues. He reported that the one-page budget summary in the packet has been changed; the health insurance figure has increased to $11,900,000. We are looking to set aside some levy reserve this year. One Committee member asked Mr. Dunham to consider reducing the general government budget this year.

UPPER CAPE TECH BUDGET

Roger Forget, Superintendent of Schools for Upper Cape, invited members of the Committee to tour the school, have lunch, and see what is happening there. He then presented slides that summarized participation in co-op placements, certifications available for students, and community involvement by students, such as working on the bandstand and other Town projects. He emphasized that the school focuses on community involvement. He then discussed per pupil cost and comparisons with other towns. The enrollment in Sandwich is up 15 students, which represents an increase of $370,349. Mr. Forget then provided detailed slides that address the budget. The main budget drivers include contracted obligations, increase in health insurance costs, increased costs of supplies related to Covid, and the need to address students’ social and emotional needs. There has been a savings through hiring a new business/finance director. In addition to the major drivers, increases are related to expanding programs, making a school psychologist full time, provision of texts and tablets to students, and transportation to athletic and other activities, such as Skills USA and Future Farmers of America. A major source of revenue is from Chapter 70 money, which has increased. When discussing capital, Mr. Forget described a plan to move all the shops out of the main building and leave the inside for academics. To accommodate this, they will need a new cafeteria and gym; the cost is estimated at $20 million with 38% coming from MSBA funding and other offsets spread over a period of years.

Questions/Comments A member questioned the need for additional social/emotional student support. Mr. Forget said that this has been part of the counseling for many years, but Covid has resulted in many students feeling isolated. He also addressed admission selection of students; there is no quota for specific towns and students are selected blindly. In response to a question about tracking students after graduation, he said that they do keep track and find that graduates who are in a trade tend to stay on the Cape. Out of district placement only occurs if a student wishes to attend a program Upper Cape does not offer; total enrollment is
225 students. The capital is charged according to the total number of students in a town’s school district; Sandwich’s contribution is $235,608. There has not been any increase in student fees. The solar canopy has been successful and there is a contract for maintenance over 20 years. Boilers are replaced approximately every 20 years. Students maintain buildings and grounds and build all new buildings, except for insulation.

SCHOOL CAPITAL REQUESTS

Dr. Gould introduced the request by providing an overview of historical capital planning. Historically, the schools have had no capital funding mechanism, except for the $125,000 annually recently supported, and capital expenditures are 2% of the budget. There is no way for schools to save money for capital from one year to the next. The past few years the building maintenance budget has increased 140%. Mr. Nelson and the consultants went over the requested projects in detail (slides are in the agenda packet). The first slide, which is a list of projects, has links (in blue) to the backup information. Major projects include moving the central offices into the Human Services building; boiler replacement; repairs to building envelopes (assessed last fall); addressing and updating HVAC systems; playground improvements; and replacement of lighting in the high school auditorium. The total cost is estimated to be $15.3 million; work would be done in the summer.

Questions/Comments There was a question about why the school administration could not move into Town Hall first floor instead of needing to redo the Human Services Building; that money could be used elsewhere. Who made this decision? Mr. Dunham explained that the decision was made by the Selectmen and School Committee during talks when the school configuration was changed. The first floor of Town Hall is not large enough for the number of people in the school administrative offices and it is optimal to have the administration located centrally among the schools. The schools are full, so offices cannot go into the schools. There was discussion about the boiler replacement. Boilers are past their lifespan at 35 years old and burners need replacing; efficiency will be improved when done. Building envelope problems include roofs, leaks through windows and skylights, brick condition, and flashing. The HVAC systems provide substandard ventilation for today’s ventilation rates; rooftop units are at end of life and are in poor condition; the systems bring humid air into the buildings. The playgrounds were designed for the K-6 configuration; Forestdale’s configuration in now K-3 and the playground has been shut down. None of the playgrounds are ADA compliant among other problems, and the playgrounds are important to children and parents. A discussion followed about allocating money in the school budget for annual/future maintenance and repairs and about priorities for the capital repairs – need to have vs nice to have. Mr. Nelson responded that all of the proposed are needed or will be needed shortly. Mr. Dunham suggested that savings from the proposed solar canopy could assist with capital; Mr. Guerin would like to see a percentage of that savings earmarked for maintenance and capital. Dr. Gould suggested that the solar savings is cost avoidance; the Town needs to say that money must be in the budget is for facilities.

Mr. Jennings then gave a presentation about the funding mechanism for the projects. He is proposing a $13 million bond to be paid back over 25 years using the level principal method, which will have the amount owed decreasing every year. Using this method, when the debt is paid, it no longer affects taxation. The tax bill impact from debt is currently $257 on an average value home; next year it will go to $215. In FY ’24 when this debt is issued it will be $266.09, or approximately $10 more than currently. The impact in the first year on the tax bill of an average valued home would be $80 and decreasing thereafter. There is no guarantee that more debt will not be approved.

Meeting Schedule

OLD BUSINESS
There will be continuing discussion and clarification of the financing at next week’s meeting. The next meetings will continue general discussion. Budget recommendations need to be finalized on March 29. Annual Town Meeting is May 2, 2022.

Other Matters Not Reasonably Anticipated for Old Business
None.

NEW BUSINESS

Other Matters Not Reasonably Anticipated for new Business
None.

Ms. Crossman and the Committee agreed to hear some public comment.

Mr. Don DiGiacomo, Chair of the Sandwich School Committee has no doubt that the repairs are needed. When the boilers were turned down last year, the School Committee was asked to come up with a long-term capital plan. He has an objection to tiering the plan. The School Committee will have an official vote on the plan at its meeting next week. He wants to be proactive, not reactive and the School Committee has been supportive. Costs of borrowing will only be increasing, so this is the best time to address this.

Ms. Kerri Ames, Vice Chair of the School Committee, stated that we are losing the Superintendent who has made a concerted effort to support maintenance. This will be a mandate to the new Superintendent.

Mr. Kevin Sareault, School Committee member, said this is an investment in the schools. The total footprint of school facilities is 494,000 square feet and operation and maintenance until last year comprised less than 1% of the budget. This is a well thought out plan and should be supported.

Ms. Kelly Cote said that the children and the schools are an investment. The playgrounds are important, and she hopes for the Committee’s endorsement.

Dr. Susan Miller, School Committee member, remembers how the schools looked when new and we have not taken care of the assets. Children are the future. She said that seniors have always supported the schools and believes they will support this plan.

ADJOURNMENT

Mr. Chaprales moved to adjourn the meeting. Mr. Shea seconded. Approved unanimously. The meeting adjourned at 9:25 PM.

Note: Finance Committee meetings are recorded and available for viewing in their entirety on the Sandwich Community Television website: https://sandwichcommunitytv.org

Respectfully submitted,

Susan James

Supporting Documents:
Minutes (3 pages)
Upper Cape Tech Presentation (30 pages)