

Approved November 1, 2023

**Advisory Committee Meeting
Zoom Video Conference
Wednesday, October 25, 2023, 6:30 p.m.**

Madison Riley, Chair, called the meeting to order at 6:30 p.m. Vice Chair, Wendy Paul, took roll call of members of Advisory in attendance.

Those present from Advisory Committee included Madison Riley, Chair; Susan Clapham, Secretary; Wendy Paul, Vice Chair; Gail Sullivan, Vice Chair; Al Ferrer; Pete Pedersen; Christina Dougherty; Rani Elwy; David Prock; Tamara Sielecki; Hanna Bonin; Phil Jameson; Jay Prosnitz; Lucienne Ronco; and Donna Stoddard.

Also in attendance were David Lussier, Superintendent, Wellesley Public Schools (WPS); Cindy Mahr, WPS Assistant Superintendent for Finance and Operations; Craig Mack, Chair, School Committee (SC); Catherine Mirick, Vice Chair, SC; Monica Visco, HR Director, WPS; Kat Bernklow, Director of Student Services, WPS; Sandy Trach, Assistant Superintendent of Teaching and Learning, WPS; Jorge Allen, Director of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion, WPS; Megan Bounit, IT Director, WPS; Barbara McMahon, Chair, Community Preservation Committee (CPC); Mark Wolfson, Recreation Commission; Paul Cramer, Chair, Recreation Commission; Matt Chin, Director, Recreation Department.

Citizen Speak

Kenna Juliani, 9 Sylvester Terrace – spoke about Wellesley’s community pickleball group and the benefits of pickleball. Ms. Juliani urged Advisory’s support for Article 5, Motion 2.

Jim Garvey, 9 Ingersoll Road – is a member of the Wellesley community pickleball group and spoke of the benefits of pickleball. Mr. Garvey requested a favorable vote for revised feasibility study.

WPS Schools – Overview, enrollment, major trends, and budget drivers

The SC and WPS leadership team provided an overview of the Wellesley schools, WPS programs, and an introduction to the FY25 budget building process. The district is complex and developing the budget involves balancing policies, enrollment, initiatives, contracts, and budget drivers. The budget is built using data, state and federal requirements, contracts, and trends that are involved in a complex educational system. The WPS leadership team presented a PowerPoint which can be found listed in the meeting documents at the end of the minutes.

Questions

- Appreciation for the presentation was expressed and a question asked about the adjustment counselors that were funded by ESSER funds and how those would be paid for if the funding is eliminated. It was felt that the adjustment counselors were very important to help students feel a sense of belonging and connectiveness.
 - When the ESSER funds were received, they funded 5.4 FTEs over two (2) years – last year and this year. The funds expire at the end of September 2024 and the plan is to include those positions in the general fund budget request for FY25. Based on conversations with principals and families, the needs have not decreased; therefore, the district believes the services of the adjustment counselors provide critical services.
- How will the school district ensure equity in the number of students at each school when Upham closes, and the redistricting occurs?
 - Redistricting was one of the key components of the HHU process. In February 2020 after an extensive community process, SC voted and approved new redistricting maps which would be implemented following the completion of the new Hunnewell and Hardy

schools. This work was done several years in advance of implementation. The district is now working to confirm assumptions made at that time with the October 1 enrollment snapshot by working with the same firm used in 2020. Any recommendations for tweaks to the maps will be brought to SC later this fall or early winter.

- A comment was made that the presentation was excellent and well organized.
- What are the other major pieces of the budget process in addition to the Select Board (SB) guidelines? For example, does the SB consider enrollment in setting the guidelines?
 - The SC Chair and Vice Chair meet regularly with the SB Chair and Vice Chair to discuss a variety of projects including the priorities, budget drivers, and on-going challenges. The SC is working on its budget guidelines to the administration. The SC takes the SB guidelines into consideration, but these guidelines are based on estimates, and the enrollment report is usually not available when these discussions initially occur. The SC wants to ensure state mandates are met, but the SC also wants to continue to support value-based items such as social and emotional learning.
- A comment was made that the presentation was fantastic and very comprehensive. A question was asked if there is any significance to the per pupil expenditure total as there are different items that are added to the per pupil expenditure total.
 - The per pupil expenditure numbers are the result of an annual report the district completes for DESE. The district provides a full financial accounting of all funds: grants, revolving funds, and general funds. The district is also required to submit the costs carried by the town in support of the schools. For example, the district does not carry health benefits in the WPS budget. The district works with the town's Finance Director, Sheryl Strother, to quantify the cost of town-provided services paid for within the town budget but which supports the schools. For example, FMD carries all the custodial services, building maintenance, small capital projects, school security, and building utilities for the school buildings. The cost of the FMD budget that is attributed to the schools is identified and reported. The district also reports DPW costs; Police department costs for crossing guards; Human Resources; Retirement Board and Finance office costs attributable to the schools. The \$24 million in "town expenses" is added to the \$84 million "school expenses" to determine the per pupil expenditure numbers. It is a consistent way to look at school budgets across multiple districts. Districts are required to report the same data in order to make a calculation for comparable purposes.
- Do the teachers at the top step only receive COLA and do not advance any more steps and lanes?
 - Yes, those at the top step only receive COLA. There are 16 steps. When a teacher is hired, they are placed on the step that is appropriate for their experience. The teacher advances one (1) step for each year completed until they reach step 16, and they would then only receive an annual COLA until they reached enough years of service to receive longevity payments.
- A question was asked if class sizes of 22 to 24 students is consistent across all elementary schools?
 - The class sizes are similar to class sizes in our peer communities and lower than other places. The class sizes are applied across the district, but they can feel different, depending on the total number of students in a grade at a particular school. A class at one school might be on the upper or lower end of the range, but these are the ranges used for staffing purposes and are consistent across the district.
 - Clarification was provided that the district is not increasing class sizes. It is a range that is reflected.
- A comment was made that it was great to see the improvement in MCAS performance across the district. A question was asked about the hiring challenges and whether other teachers must expand their workload to accommodate the vacancies.

- Hiring hourly staff and substitute teachers has been a challenge. In this market many of the Unit C staff have been hired by other districts as teachers. Progress has been made in filling vacancies (which currently number around 10 (ten)). Efforts to fill those vacancies continue. Hiring began in the spring for the upcoming year so some of the groups were realigned to support the students and building-based needs. In the past it was unusual to have people leave mid-year but that has changed.
- What will happen with Upham when the school closes?
 - The SC has been clear that there was no desire to give up the building and they will retain ownership. There likely will be some short- and long-term needs. Recreation and the Health Department will temporarily relocate to Upham during the Warren renovation in 2025. The site also has potential for an interim solution to expand the preschool. Any long-term use of the building for preschool will require a new building. The district is short on space for meetings and for training so Upham might be a site for those needs. SC is discussing some of those potential uses. The building will not be sold but the plan is to have a SC and community conversation about the next educational use of the Upham property.
- A comment was made that the presentation was a very full presentation and the best in recent years. A comment was made about having a better understanding of the transition points from elementary to middle school and middle school to high school and whether those transition points are significant for both continuing within the public schools and the types of supports that are needed. A desire was expressed for understanding the grade ratio at the end of elementary to middle school and at the end of middle school to high school and continuing the conversation around supports and those transition points.
- A comment was made that within the special education presentation it would be good to know the total number of students receiving services and the largest number of those students receiving special education that are within the district and the impact of special education in Wellesley. Out of district placements and in district program numbers would be helpful to know. A comment was made that it would also be good to see in the presentation the percentage of students on IEPs within the district versus our peer towns.
- A comment was made that given the declining enrollment, the FTE conversation will likely continue this year and it would be helpful to understand how the declining enrollment at the high school translates to reductions in FTEs.
- A request was made for student MCAS performance for science.
- Does the MTSS (multi-tiered system of support) apply across all schools? Does it only apply to students on IEPs? Are these two (2) different programs?
 - They are not different programs. They are connected programs. MTSS is a larger umbrella. If, as they move through MTSS, students are not making the type of progress in the general education classroom, the team will work with the parents and decide whether a referral to special education is needed.
- Will FY25 be the first year of a longer range look at how the schools will operate within the context of the budget? Hardy will open in FY25. This seems to be a good first year of a longer-term look of how the schools will be structured.
 - There will be some upfront savings when top line staff positions, such as the school principal and school nurse, are consolidated. However, teachers follow the students; even though Upham is closing, those students will move to other schools based on redistricting and will need teachers at the new schools. There may be some savings based on efficiency, but the district has been reducing teaching positions based on the number of sections needed for enrollment without the overall consolidation of the schools. The district has not redistricted in 20 years, but given the shifts demographically in town,

birthrates, real estate, and remote work, things are still in flux in terms of the distribution of students. Enrollment might start to do things that were not expected.

- A comment was made that it will be helpful to highlight the savings that will accrue from the consolidation and redistricting process in the FY25 budget.

Article 5, Motion 2 – Recreation and CPC

CPC and Recreation presented a high-level review of a new proposal from Recreation regarding the pickleball feasibility study. It will be a three-phase feasibility study with a needs assessment; evaluation criteria for a good site; and evaluation of the different parcels in ranked order. The top two (2) sites will be identified for potential pickleball courts. Recreation's request to CPC is for \$70,000 in CPA funds to fund the feasibility study. If the amount requested/appropriated exceeds what is spent, the unspent funds would be returned to CPC.

Questions

- What is the size of the Wellesley pickleball community?
 - There were 1,400 reservations for pickleball courts in town based on data from PlayLocal. Most pickleball games have 4 players.
- Has there been an attempt to survey people to see if they want pickleball courts in Wellesley, given the private options opening in other towns, such as at the Natick Mall? Is there a market for pickleball courts?
 - The field utilization study indicated 14 pickleball courts are needed to meet the current demand. Part of the feasibility study will be a needs assessment.
- Support was expressed for the feasibility study if it included a market evaluation of the pickleball interest in Wellesley. Concern was expressed about spending money on something that might be a fad and the interest might disappear in a few years.
 - The first item on the list is to conduct a needs assessment before looking at the evaluation criteria.
- Who are the town groups and stakeholders mentioned in the proposal?
 - Groups that are responsible for the land in town such as DPW and the NRC. This is a survey of land that the town has control over. It also includes neighbors and abutters. Recreation is trying to include anyone who wants to be part of the conversation, and this includes town residents.
- When are the public meetings in the process?
 - Recreation expects to have the first public meeting when establishing the criteria in phase one.
- Do you envision the environmental impact criteria will include other environmental impacts such as trees and water issues.
 - Recreation will be considering trees, wildlife, noise, parking, and traffic.
- A comment was made that resolving pickleball issues in Wellesley is narrow. It was felt that the pickleball options outside of Wellesley should be considered, as it is not that far to drive to other communities.
 - That will be captured in the needs assessment. The needs assessment is to determine the pickleball need within the town of Wellesley for the residents of Wellesley.
- A suggestion was made to search within a 10-mile radius of Wellesley to see if solutions can be found there and perhaps the solution should not be only within the confines of Wellesley.
 - Recreation is looking at the Town of Wellesley and what Recreation can provide to the residents of Wellesley.
- A comment was made that a survey question might be: "Is it sufficient to play at the new courts in Natick or somewhere outside of Wellesley?"
- Do we have people from other towns coming to Wellesley to play and is that part of the problem?

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- The reservation system, PlayLocal, requires people be a Wellesley resident to reserve a court in town. The system was adjusted a couple of years ago to require people to register through the Recreation Department to be able to use PlayLocal to make reservations.
- One of the reasons people go to other towns to play is the lack of availability of courts in Wellesley. Other towns also have pressure for the use of their courts. Also, people like to play outside.
- The tennis players are also putting pressure on Recreation to make more courts available for pickleball so they can have greater access to the tennis courts.
- Is there a creative way the Town could access the tennis courts at the former Boston Sports Club at Babson since this feasibility study will take time?
 - There are short term and long-term solutions. Some solutions are under Recreation's control. The Babson courts would cost money to rent, and those courts and land are not under Recreation's control. Recreation does not have the budget to rent private courts. It would most likely be cost-prohibitive for the town to explore a temporary lease agreement with Babson.

Discuss and Vote 2023 STM Warrant Articles

Article 5, Motion 2

Susan Clapham made, and Wendy Paul seconded a motion for favorable action on Warrant Article 5, Motion 2, as proposed by the Community Preservation Committee, that the Town appropriate \$70,000 to the Recreation Department to conduct a feasibility study for the siting of pickleball courts in the Town of Wellesley, with the goal of identifying appropriate locations in Town for detailed feasibility and design studies, such appropriation to be funded entirely from the Community Preservation Funds undesignated balance as set forth in the warrant and the motion.

Discussion

- Support for the motion was expressed as it shows that Recreation listened to feedback and expanded the feasibility study. It was felt that many stakeholders will provide input.
- Support for the revised motion was expressed as this solution satisfies all three groups who spoke.
- Strong support for the revised proposal was expressed as a fair and reasonable approach through studies to see if there is an opportunity to provide additional courts for pickleball in Wellesley. It was felt that there is a tremendous amount of interest in pickleball in Wellesley.
- Additional support for the revised proposal was expressed and it was felt to be a better plan than the original plan.
- A comment was made that this is a complicated problem for the Town as the Town becomes more congested and developed. It was felt that this will take some time to work out.
- Appreciation for the revised proposal was expressed.

Roll Call Vote

Wendy Paul - yes

Al Ferrer – yes

Pete Pedersen- yes

Christina Dougherty - yes

Rani Elwy - yes

David Prock – yes

Tamara Sielecki - yes

Gail Sullivan -yes

Hanna Bonin – yes

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Phil Jameson - yes
Jay Prosnitz - yes
Lucienne Ronco - yes
Donna Stoddard - yes
Susan Clapham – yes

Advisory recommends favorable action on Article 5, Motion 2, 14 to 0.

Minutes Approval

Rani Elwy made, and Pete Pedersen seconded a motion to approve the October 19, 2023, minutes.

Roll Call Vote

Wendy Paul - yes
Al Ferrer – yes
Pete Pedersen - yes
Christina Dougherty - yes
Rani Elwy - yes
David Prock – yes
Tamara Sielecki - yes
Gail Sullivan -yes
Hanna Bonin – yes
Phil Jameson - yes
Jay Prosnitz - yes
Lucienne Ronco - yes
Donna Stoddard - yes
Susan Clapham – yes

The October 19, 2023, minutes were approved, 14 to 0.

Liaison Updates

Wendy Paul/Select Board– recommended Advisory members listen to the October 24, 2024, SB meeting as there was a lengthy discussion about MBTA communities; Joe McDonough and the COA presented a proposal for a kitchen feasibility study to make the COA kitchen serviceable.

Christina Dougherty/Library– provided an update of the recent WFL Trustees meeting – promotions were announced; the BOH spoke to the library about the possibility of a Narcan rescue box in the lobby; the new sculpture is being unveiled this week; the Foundation gala will be April 11, 2024; the FY25 capital requests were discussed; the FY25 Annual Action Plan was also discussed; there are new policies around videotaping and food and beverage consumption; new library card designs were reviewed. There was discussion about presenting to the HR board again on Article 10.

Administrative

A review of the upcoming meetings was provided.

Christina Dougherty made, and Hanna Bonin seconded a motion to adjourn.

Roll Call Vote

Wendy Paul - yes
Al Ferrer – yes
Pete Pedersen- yes
Christina Dougherty - yes
Rani Elwy - yes

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David Prock – yes
Tamara Sielecki - yes
Gail Sullivan -yes
Hanna Bonin – yes
Phil Jameson - yes
Jay Prosnitz - yes
Lucienne Ronco - yes
Donna Stoddard - yes
Susan Clapham – yes

A roll call vote was taken, and the meeting was unanimously adjourned at 9:10 p.m., 14 to 0.

Meeting Materials [October 25, 2023, meeting materials](#)

- Draft 10/19/23 minutes
- CPC – Rec cost estimates pickleball study
- CPC – Rec Pickleball summary for Advisory
- CPC- Rec Short Form Request for pickleball study
- FY24 Advisory Committee Presentation 10/25/23