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5/30/08 EC
Edline*

**Milton School Committee
Open Public Budget Hearing
Milton High School Library
April 1, 2008**

Meeting called to order at 7:00 p.m.

Committee Present: Beirne Lovely, Chair, Lynda Lee Sheridan, Vice Chair, Chris Huban, Mary Kelly, Laurie Stillman and Glenn Pavlicek

Staff Present: Dr. Magdalene Giffune, Superintendent; Mary Gormley, Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum & Personnel; Paul Hilton, Assistant Superintendent for Business

Mr. Lovely gave a brief overview of the budget. Starting from the FY08 base of \$31,658,970, the Warrant Committee has indicated the schools will receive an additional \$200,000 bringing our FY09 budget to \$31,858,970. The School Committee had approved a budget for FY09 of \$33,184,463. Not included in this figure is \$517,028 which would be needed to give teachers a 2% increase (negotiations are on-going). This would bring what is needed for FY09 to \$33,701,491. As a result of these calculations, reductions amounting to \$1,842,521 (\$33,701,491-\$31,858,970) will have to be made. Although the effort has been to keep teachers in the class rooms and maintain class size, the Committee is aware that additional money will be needed for rising costs in electricity/heat, etc. As a result of this shortfall, several existing and proposed positions will have to be cut along with further cuts made to materials, supplies and equipment and a reorganization of Unit B positions (Directors and Curriculum Leaders). The list of reductions includes 5 teachers at the Middle School; 6 at the High School; 5-6 teachers at the Elementary schools and 7 K-8 specialists. This would make the total reductions at Pierce 9 (5 teachers and 4 specialists); in Elementary it would be 5 teachers in addition to 3 specialists. As a result of this budget situation, Mr. Lovely stated the Committee is also faced with potentially having to move students out of their original districts. After reviewing the list of proposed reductions, Mr. Lovely stated no decisions will be made until after Town Meeting. He then invited community members present to voice their concerns.

Joan Faulkner requested that the Committee keep in mind the programs that feed the souls of the children and of the town as they go through the budget process. Having children who have gone through the school system, she felt most connected and proud when seeing concerts of the school bands and choruses and seeing these students participate in town events such as the Memorial Day Parade and the Veteran's Day ceremony.

Steve Morash suggested looking at teachers who may be ready to take an early retirement to make way for younger teachers. He is glad many have taken a stand on the Nepotism Policy and asked the Committee to look at what they did three years ago and not make any changes to that policy. Mr. Morash also took a moment to thank Laurie Stillman and her family for all they have done for the town over the last several years.

Erica Donahue feels the music program provides an opportunity for socialization for children. For some students who may not be athletes, making the elementary band is the equivalent to making Majors in baseball. Ms. Donahue asked the Committee to consider how important it is for students to feel they are part of something; the music program provides this opportunity and cannot be cut.

Earl Fay stated that if faced with an override, he would not vote for it. He feels many families are being faced with economic challenges (particularly seniors and those families with disabled children) and increasing property taxes would only make this worse. He addressed Administration's failure to communicate with the public and the lack of transparency in the budget process. In addition, Mr. Fay commented on Special Education Administration's failure to follow through on efficiencies that would enhance programming; requested that School Choice be adequately reviewed; commented on the inequities of French Immersion and feels the program should be cut if it is determined that it costs more; asked why more administrative staff could not be cut before cutting teachers; and asked the Committee to revisit the student assignment policy.

Karen Friedman-Hanna listed many colleges that current seniors have heard from so far and feels that what sets our students apart is the well-rounded education they receive. She stated we have a remarkable program which we are about to destroy and she would support an override no matter what. She hopes the Selectmen work with the community to get an override passed.

Catherine Reddington agrees this situation is unacceptable. She will not vote for an override every year or every other year so that we can continue to be inefficient. Ms. Reddington made several suggestions including: energy audits for all the schools; unplugging computers; keeping art and music since cutting them in Elementary will decimate the High School program; cutting buses unless there is a legal reason for providing them; and suggested the Town join the GIC and be more practical with health care. In response to Ms. Reddington's suggestions Mr. Lovely added that the teachers were first to step up and offer to be part of the GIC; however, it was not a uniform decision. With regard to energy audits, Ms. Sheridan informed her that the Facilities Subcommittee is current working on that. Ms. Reddington suggested putting Facilities Subcommittee updates on the School Committee agenda monthly. With regard to transportation, Mr. Pavlicek added that we have cut transportation as much as we legally can.

Sara Mills feels seeing the next generation come through the school system without art and music would be tragic. With regard to the budget, she asked how the Committee ruled out the Assistant Superintendent cut. In response, Mr. Lovely stated the School Committee voted unanimously to keep that position since historically they have had this position in addition to the Assistant Superintendent for Business. The Committee felt these two positions are necessary for a school system this size. Ms. Mills also asked about closing the Middle School library. Mr. Lovely responded that the Middle School library has been able to remain open after school due to outside funding. Closing it may be a possibility; however, at this point libraries are not on the list. Ms. Mills feels an override is needed; however, she stated we must plan ahead so we don't end up in this situation every year. She suggested cutting back on the use of paper by using more email.

Don Green spoke of the Full Day Kindergarten and the fact that it is over subscribed and many students may have to go to different schools. He asked that the Committee exhaust all possibilities before reassigning students and asked that they consider the sibling criteria.

Kate Hamblet stated many issues such as French Immersion/English and class size are perennial issues. As a parent, she feels having art and music in elementary school in addition to academics has made her child warmer and more empathetic. As a teacher, she is concerned with how not being able to offer 4 years of science will impact students trying to get in to college. She asked if there were small sources of revenue within the school we are missing. For example, Ms. Mills asked why the lights in the Cunningham library remain on at night. She suggested using the Collicot/Cunningham gym in more creative ways and perhaps charging children to use the gym for soccer games, etc. on a weekend. She also asked if we could bridge the gap by using parent volunteers.

Linda Farwell feels not having art and music until 9th grade would be detrimental. She feels Assistant Principal positions should be looked at in this budget and more email should be used to reduce the use of paper sent home in the backpacks. Ms. Farwell stated that if art and music are kept in the budget, all classes should be held in the art and music rooms. She mentioned one class at Cunningham has "art on a cart" where a substitute art teacher comes to the class with art materials. She has also heard a rumor that art and music rooms would be used as classrooms next year due to the high enrollment in Kindergarten. Mr. Lovely clarified that Full Day Kindergarten grants do not permit a class in excess of 20. Ms. Gormley mentioned there are 3 rooms at Tucker designed for Full Day Kindergarten; 4 at Glover; 4 at Collicot; and 4 at Cunningham. They anticipate 14 Kindergarten classes for next year and one ½ day session. There are also 5 Pre-K classes to consider and they continue to work on the utilization of rooms. Ms. Gormley clarified that there is a certified Art teacher at Collicot/Cunningham, not a substitute.

Thomas Buchau agrees the budget is unacceptable. He feels communication needs to be more open in order to educate the citizens of Milton. Mr. Buchau feels we all need to do our part to make this work. In response Mr. Lovely urged the community to contact the Selectmen and their Town Meeting Members to express their opinions.

Carol Andrews believes the cuts made in grades K-8 will float up and impact the High School programs. She stated college admission offices look at extra curricular activities and echoed a previous concern regarding the 4 year science requirement of many colleges.

Elaine Davis had sent an email to the Committee asking them to explain why a consolidated school model would not work as opposed to some of the severe cuts being mentioned. She asked the Committee to keep in mind this plan was supposed to be cost effective when it was originally presented. This plan got students together earlier, allowed for more flexibility when moving students, and provided the benefit of having services in one building. Ms Davis stated that if she had to choose convenience over loss of services, she would choose services every time. Mr. Lovely responded that Dr. Giffune has put a presentation together for this evening's meeting regarding consolidating schools.

Muna Killingback cannot imagine having any more cuts to art and music. She believes class size is already too large and fears the loss of reading and math specialists may endanger the quality of education.

Katie Conboy previously worked on the Long Range Planning Committee. She suggested going back to some of the Committee's recommendations to look for cost sharing measures with the rest of the town. As a college administrator, Ms. Conboy stated colleges not only look for 4 years in science but in many other subjects as well. With regard to the art and music programs, she spoke of the social aspect of being part of these programs and feels the cuts we have already made to them have made them less vibrant.

Ariel Carpenter, a student at Milton High, is in her 12th year of French Immersion and 9th year in the music program. With regard to French Immersion, she does not believe it is full of inequities since it is open to anyone who wants to join. She spoke of how important the music program has been to her and how much she has benefited from this experience. Ms. Carpenter feels that if she had not been so involved in the music program over the years, she would not have made the same friendships.

Katrina O'Grady, a student at Milton High, asked people to look at the art work in the High School lobby. If art were to be cut from K-8, Ms. O'Grady feels there would not be as many amazing artists at Milton High School.

She also spoke of the music program and stated that is where her heart is. Everything about the music program is awesome, and Ms. O'Grady feels we should do whatever we can to keep it.

Dianne Di'Tullio-Agostino was ecstatic to see the room full tonight. As she has stated in the past, she believes the budget is not as transparent as it should be. With regard to saving money, she would be interested in seeing a spreadsheet comparing costs of electricity and heat over the last several years. She mentioned magnet schools and feels this could be economical for French Immersion. Other suggestions she made were to hold some type of annual event to raise money such as the Swap-It at Milton Academy. She also suggested selling tickets to school performances and creating an email address on the Town's website for community members to put their suggestions as to how we can raise money.

Steve Rosner stated consolidated schools had been discussed at length last year; however, the community and most members of the School Committee were in favor of maintaining neighborhood schools. Some of the reasons the community did not favor the consolidated plan were that it did not take into account capacity at the schools and additional costs associated with busing children. Mr. Rosner feels these points should be looked at again before any decision is made. He asked that the Committee evaluate their choice with clear minds and accurate facts. He also asked the Committee to dispel rumors that a consolidated school plan would save the French Immersion program.

Natalie McKnight agrees with everything said about the importance of the art and music programs. She stated that Proposition 2 ½ limits us and unless there are frequent overrides we will always fall behind.

Catherine King asked that the Committee keep in mind that when the consolidated school plan was presented to the community last year, art and music were not being cut. She would be willing have the consolidated school plan if it meant keeping art and music.

Jennifer Anastasiades would like to see some agreement as to what the overall goals are. The goals should not change from year to year depending on who yells the loudest.

Mr. Lovely thanked all community members for their input.

Motion was made to close the Open Public Budget Hearing and to commence the regular School Committee meeting.

Move: L. Sheridan
Second: G. Pavlicek
Vote: 6-0-0