



MEETING OF CITY COUNCIL
FINANCE COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE
59 COURT STREET
MUNICIPAL BUILDING, CITY COUNCIL CHAMBERS
WESTFIELD, MASSACHUSETTS
MAY 24, 2022 AT 5:30 PM

The meeting was called to order at 5:30 PM by Councilor Matthews-Kane, Chair of the Finance Committee.

The Clerk called the roll. Councilors Allie, Beltrandi, Flaherty and Morganelli were absent.

Public Participation - None

The Departmental Budget Hearings were as follows:

Council on Aging Department

Council on Aging Executive Director Tina Gorman was present to represent the department. She presented some changes to her budget that were not on the original submission to the Mayor. One change that was made was an increase to the Gas and Electric item for the increasing costs. She informed the Council that the part time activities aide position has been moved to the State Formula Grant. She reviewed the other positions in the department with one new proposed position for a special projects coordinator and expanded job responsibilities for the senior benefits coordinator due to the retirement of the current employee. Councilor Bean asked if there is any thought to expanding the Senior Center hours to Saturdays or evenings. The Director replied that it's tricky because there would have to be a rotation of staff and there have been some programs offered on Saturdays and evenings and there doesn't seem to be a pattern of participation and if it's worth it. Councilors Adams, Figy and Bean thanked the Director for her service to the Senior Center.

Upon motion of Councilor Sullivan, it was
VOTED: That the Council on Aging budget, as submitted, be APPROVED.

Veterans Services

Veterans Director Julie Barnes was present to represent the Veterans Services department. She reviewed the budget and informed the Council that there was an increase of \$5,000 to supplies for aluminum grave markers. There's an increase of 6% for Veterans' services per MGL and its 75% reimbursed by the State. She also invited all Councilors to the Memorial Day parade. Councilor Adams thanked the Director for all she does for Veterans. Councilor Sullivan questioned if the State is current on

reimbursements. The Director replied that the State is about a year behind and that's how it's been since she took the position. Councilor Burns also thanked the Director and commented that it's been an honor to serve with her. He asked if there has been an increase for outreach. The Director replied that she has continued with the outreach all during COVID. Councilor Burns asked how many Veterans are being served. The Director replied that it's about 2,000 Veterans in Westfield and also assist some Veterans from the hilltowns. Councilor Bean asked how many out of town Veterans are being served. The Director replied it is about 5 a month. Councilor Harris, as a Gold Star Daughter, thanked Julie for all she does for the Veterans.

Upon motion of Councilor Harris, it was
VOTED: That the Veterans Services budget, as submitted, be APPROVED.

Westfield Athenaeum

Director Guy McLain was present to represent the Westfield Athenaeum. He reviewed the budget salary items. He informed the Council that there are currently 25 staff positions, 16 full time and 9 part time which is down about 5 positions due to COVID and it is sometimes difficult to maintain because the Athenaeum must be open 60 hours a week to meet State certification. Councilor Sullivan requested clarification that the current number in the budget of \$1,085,500 is for the current staffing and questioned what the original request of \$1,441,000 was for. The Director replied that that was a goal to staff the outstanding positions that are available but it was decided that the current staff of 25 will be ok at this time. Councilor Matthews-Kane informed the Council that the Athenaeum is not truly a department and that it has a unique relationship with the City. The Director replied that it's a nonprofit to provide public library services and the museum is not part of the budget. And also there is state funding provided. And it is a good partnership.

Upon motion of Councilor Harris, it was
VOTED: That the Westfield Athenaeum budget, as submitted, be APPROVED.

School Department

Superintendent Stefan Czaporowski was present to represent the School Department budget. The Superintendent reviewed the points of priority in determining the budget which were to continue implementation of meeting all of the learning requirements of all students, expanding preschool options, improve two way communication and continue supporting the social and emotional needs of all students. He informed the Council that the low income student percentage is growing from 42.3% in 2021 to 50.1% in 2022 and most likely will continue to grow. The federal school lunch program is ending June 30th, 2022 and the school lunch program has seen an increase in participation and it is a fear what will happen to those students once the program ends and that the School department is working on that. Also there are now new languages within the schools and that needs to be addressed and has increased. The budget increase is \$1.5 million and Chapter 70 increase is \$1.6 million and the City would be contributing \$67,000 less this year after \$570,000 of reductions that were approved by

the School Committee. The staff/expense ratio has changed from 80% staff and 20% expenses to 75% staff and 25% expenses. The ESSER grant funding has to be related to COVID-19 and has to be approved by DESI. Due to COVID there have been staffing shortages but never to the level of shutting down the schools. The ESSER grant will be used for transportation, HVAC needs of the schools, phone systems, summer programming at no cost, a virtual school, math interventionists and tutoring assistance. The biggest struggle is mental health concerns as a result of the pandemic and the grant has been used to add more counselors and also to use River Valley and it's still not enough to meet the needs of the students. Another goal is expanding preschool due to the pandemic because some kindergarteners have not had preschool. There is pilot program to expand preschool at Southampton Road for a full day program. Councilor Adams questioned how many counselors are being hired. The Superintendent replied that they haven't added anymore and trying to balance it with River Valley and to be aware that if hired with ESSER money will have to be laid off and there is a shortage of counselors. Councilor Adams informed the Superintendent that counselors are needed and that more money should be put in the budget to hire counselors so that teachers and principals do not have to deal with discipline issues. Councilor Mello questioned the cost to continue the food program across the summer. The Superintendent responded that he will get that answer and added that Franklin Ave, Abner and Paper Mill will remain free due to their populations and if the low income grows in the other schools they would be free also. Councilor Mello asked the Superintendent to broadly explain why we invest in public education. The Superintendent replied that public education was founded so that everyone would have access to education to become productive in society and it's the responsibility to teach children without cost. Councilor Figy asked what is the wait list for Westfield Technical Academy and what is the out of district total tuition. The Superintendent responded that the wait list is 40 and total out of district tuition is \$140,000. Councilor Figy questioned the leases at Head Start at 390 Southampton Road and at Russell Road that are coming to an end and are not favorable to the City and should not be reentered into. The Superintendent responded that the business model of the leases are not favorable but 390 Southampton Road is being looked at for the Fort Meadow program and the pathways program which is at risk 11 and 12th graders is at Russell Road and is needed and that they ran out of time looking for a new location and that there is a lack of real estate and that is a concern. Councilor Bean asked if there has been any discussion to have cell phone use banned in the schools. The Superintendent replied they are following the Chicopee issue and that the top priority is to teach responsibility in using a cell phone and that banning them would cause more trouble than it is worth. Councilor Bean respectfully disagreed with the Superintendent. Councilor Bean questioned the school officers for schools. The Superintendent replied that it's in the Police budget and if fully staffed it would be for 3 officers. Councilor Bean questioned on line learning if it will be expanded. The Superintendent replied that the virtual school is online with live teachers. There is also a program called Ingenuity that allows students to learn at their own rate or to take a class that is not being offered. Councilor Bean questioned if there

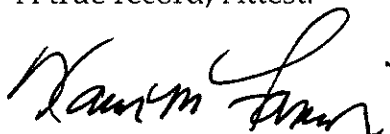
are any partnerships relative to track or turf purposes. The Superintendent replied that there are some partnerships with Roots, WSU and the Boys and Girls club. Councilor Burns questioned if the budget contains increases for increased gas and electric costs. The Superintendent replied that the costs have been increased and will continue to be looked at to work within the budget. Councilor Sullivan asked what the school population will be next year. The Superintendent replied that it's at 4,774 which is a growth and that there are increases with refugees. Councilor Sullivan questioned if the increase is in kindergarten and once certified to send to the Council for Census purposes. Councilor Sullivan added that he believes that the school budget is underfunded and that public education is the most important responsibility of the city. Councilor Sullivan questioned the use of the Angie Holmes house. The Superintendent replied that it has been deemed unsafe. Councilor Bean questioned the St. Casimir's property. The Superintendent replied that it's used for storage and would like to sell it but first needs to digitalize the records. Councilor Figy commented that with the expansion of the virtual school will cut down students that are being home schooled due to fear of COVID. Councilor Burns questioned if there are any grants for electric buses. The Superintendent replied that he has passed that information to Lecrenski. Councilor Adams questioned the cost of the rent for facilities that are being rented instead of owning a property. The Superintendent replied that the rents are favorable. Councilor Matthews-Kane questioned if virtual out of district tuition will be allowed. The Superintendent replied that it's up to the Board of Education and at this time virtual schools are not favorable.

Upon motion of Councilor Figy, it was
VOTED: That the School budget, as submitted, be APPROVED.

Councilor Sullivan was OPPOSED. He informed the Council that he believes it is underfunded, but will support it at the final vote.

At 7:12 PM and upon motion of Councilor Harris, it was
VOTED: To ADJOURN.

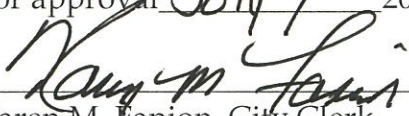
A true record, Attest:



Karen M. Fanion
City Clerk/Clerk of the Council

Presented to the Mayor


For approval July 7 2022



Karen M. Fanion, City Clerk

Approved by the Mayor

7-12 2022



Michael A. McCabe, Mayor