

MINUTES
WORKSHOP/SPECIAL MEETING
DOVER CITY COUNCIL
CITY COUNCIL CHAMBERS
MAY 28, 2003
7:00 PM

Councilors present: Mayor Nossiff, Whitmore, Keays, Tweedie, Hindle, Christenbury, Quigley, and Mayberry (at 7:10).

Absent: Mayor Pro Tem Dunnington.

A. DISCUSSION RE: SCHOOL PORTION OF FY2004 BUDGET

School Board Chairman Nick Skaltsis began by distributing a corrected page of the packet previously distributed to the Council. He explained that the request is for \$32,870,548 which is an increase of \$840,091 over last year or 2.62%. He explained that the Joint Fiscal Committee instructed them to come back with no more than a 3% increase. This was not an easy task because there were many programs they were looking to enhance and some new ones they wanted to start but will now have to delay. As education advocates it was difficult to come to that conclusion, but the budget was passed unanimously by the School Board. The budget process actually began back in October of 2002 with the letter from the Commissioner informing them that the adequacy funding was being reallocated taking us from collecting 6.3 million to 5 million which is down 1.3 million. If they were to try to make up that money it would have meant a \$1.00 increase on the tax rate, which would not be acceptable. Also, there were built in costs for bussing and labor negotiations for all 4 labor groups. Because 80% of the budget is personnel expense they began with a hiring freeze and were able to eliminate 12 positions and reclassify/reorganize 14 positions. Next they cut all non personnel items (except utilities) by 1/3 ie, books, paper etc, which will be deferred.

He explained that the hiring freeze worked well allowing them to eliminate clerical, administration and some teachers by not filling vacant positions. They were able to fully institute the Freshman Academy through reorganization. However, they have also had to add additional teams for both 7 and 8th grade next year as there are 50 more students per grade.

Skaltsis stated that this budget takes into account the significant drop in the revenues from the State as well the personnel contracts. It also represents a cut of \$1,000,000 from the Superintendents proposed budget.

Next he discussed the growth in the City and the impact on the school system with 8 classrooms each having to be added to the Dover High School and Dover Middle School. The figures for students in grades K-4 seem to have stabilized for now, but growth does have a tremendous impact on the school system.

The School Board has also formulated a Plan B supplemental budget to account for the lowest possible amount they could receive from the State and if it goes lower, then they will have to return with a spending formula to recover that difference.

He went on to explain that the Truancy Officer and the School Resource Officers at the High School and Middle School are extremely important to the parents, teachers etc with 2000 people in the High School Building and 1200 in the Middle School every day and feels that we need to work together to keep these positions in place.

Other upcoming issues include they have begun negotiations with Barrington as there is only 1 more year left in the 5 year contract, and the parking problem at Dover High School will be addressed by the Traffic Advisory Commission with a possible fee for parking to be imposed.

Finally, he addressed comparisons made to other school districts which he feels must be done carefully and by taking all things into account. Although Portsmouth spends \$10,000 per child compared to Dover's \$8,000, we do an excellent job with that money. He understands that

\$32,000,000 is a lot of money but coming in with a 3% increase budget wasn't easy, but they did it as fairly and openly as they could and nobody was spared. There were no "sacred cows" ie, football, art, music, etc.

Mayor Nossiff stated that he has sometimes worn a black hat when it comes to the school budget, but now he wants to give credit where it is due. He understands that the School Board was not happy to have made cuts but feels they were made diligently and fairly and they were still able to account for the negotiated contracts. He stated that we have taken steps forward in the past several years but now we are pausing and deferring things until later, which allows the taxpayers to take a breath.

Skaltsis credited Superintendent LaSelva for addressing the adequacy funding figures from the State in October which was very sobering, but actually is a sign of Dover's success.

Tweedie asked how much of the adequacy funding will be used on one time expenditures and how much will go to recurring costs such as positions and how many years are we guaranteed to get this funding.

Skaltsis stated that hiring personnel with the State money is a difficult decision. He feels it is hard to tell what the funding situation will be for more than two years because the legislature will be different after the elections. He explained that in making their cuts, a big hit was made to the Curriculum Revision program that was implemented several years ago. This year was going to be the Science curriculum, but now only some of the projects will be able to be done. He stated that this is a mandate from the State and we may be able to defer it for now, but it does have to be done.

He continued by stating that he would consider funding the Truancy and Resource Officers with the money because it is a major priority.

Christenbury thanked the members of the Parent/Teacher Organizations and other parents and staff for working together to support this budget because it was a fair process. He stated that in past years there have been groups of parents who have had to come speak because their programs were eliminated, i.e., band, track. etc. Next, he asked about the \$408,600 increase in the Fund Transfers and where did it come from? It came from Special Education. Next, he asked about the increase of \$1,146,970 (27.29%) in tuition revenue and is that coming from an increase in students. Skaltsis stated yes, there are 40 additional students from Barrington alone and the tuition has been adjusted.

Christenbury asked if the current negotiations include reflecting the appropriate share of capital costs in the tuition.

Skaltsis stated that everything is on the table and there is a State formula, but we don't have to go by it.

Christenbury continued by stating that the tuition needs to reflect all associated costs. He fully supports this budget and sat on the Joint Fiscal Committee for 2 years and knows that nobody thought that they would or could come back with a 3% increase budget. He saw the work that the Superintendent and School Board both put into this.

Skaltsis stated that faith plays an important role in this budget because this is a bare bones budget and so now they have to have faith that the Council will accept this because they have fulfilled their request.

Mayberry thanked the paraprofessional and teacher unions for not going to arbitration for the first time in many years and he also supports this budget as presented.

Skaltsis stated that all 4 unions came to the table fully understanding there was a drop in funding and a lot of them are taxpayers as well. There was a spirit of coming to an agreement to reflect the current times.

Whitmore is also impressed with the tremendous teamwork and thanked all of those involved. She asked about the pupil transportation increase.

Skaltsis stated that the contract was back loaded to achieve the goal for this year but feels that this is a very fair 5 year contract. He explained that the transportation issue has been difficult to project in the past years due to constant changes within the school system, i.e. adding kindergarten, moving the middle school, changing the grades at the middle school etc. He feels that it is fairly well established now however and should not have any more major changes. Also, the cost of Special Education transportation is quite expensive.

Keays also commended the School Board for this budget. He asked if any thought has been given to the possibility of Dover becoming a donor town within the next few years.

Skaltsis stated that Dover could become a donor town if the existing law remains, but that all of the bills out there right now will lower the state property tax. He agrees however, that Dover can at least expect to see less and less money each year.

7:30 PM

SPECIAL MEETING

1. ROLL CALL - ***No formal roll call was taken***

Mayor Nossiff thanked Chairman Skaltsis and opened the public hearing:

2. PUBLIC HEARING

- A. SCHOOL PORTION OF FY2004 BUDGET

Ron Huml - 99 Mast Road – stated that the School Board did a good job on the budget and was fair to everyone. He does feel that there should be a breakdown included of what are the State requirements for providing an adequate education.

Edward Bleiler, 28 Isaac Lucas Circle - stated he has been a resident of Dover for 6 years and in that time his property taxes have gone from \$9,000 to \$15,000 a year and feels that people are being hoodwinked by the School Department. It may be only a 3% increase this year, but next year they will be back crying for more. He discussed the amount per child figures that were mentioned stating that money doesn't educate children, teachers are supposed to be the motivators. He feels that there are too many administrators in the system and that when he was a boy his teacher was also the principal and did the administrative work after 4:00 p.m. He stated he will be back on June 4th to address the city budget especially the public works department, which he feels is being cut too much especially in the road repairs.

Seeing no one else wishing to speak the Mayor closed the public hearing.

3. OTHER BUSINESS

Hindle asked about the report from the consultants on the ice arena.

Joyal stated we received a draft last week which was made available and was discussed by the Arena Commission at a special meeting, but they are requesting additional information for the report.

Quigley asked what are the Charter requirements regarding abstaining from a vote on an issue.

Christenbury stated that both in the Charter and Robert Rules it calls for anyone with a conflict of interest to announce it and the reason for it at the beginning of debate, have it accepted or denied by the body, and if accepted, the member is not allowed to participate in any discussion or debate.

Quigley stated that this Council has not followed these rules and there have been instances where the announcement of abstaining has come at the end of the debate on several issues.

Mayor Nossiff stated that is correct and these rules will be followed from here on.

4. ADJOURNMENT

Tweedie moved to adjourn, seconded by Tweedie. Motion passed unanimously.

Valerie A. French
Deputy City Clerk