

MINUTES
SPECIAL MEETING/WORKSHOP
DOVER CITY COUNCIL
COUNCIL CHAMBERS
WEDNESDAY
JUNE 5, 2002
6:30 PM

1. ROLL CALL:

Members Present: Christenbury, Dunnington, Hindle, Hofemann, Quigley, Tweedie, Whitmore and Nossiff. Taylor present at 7:00 p.m.

2. PUBLIC HEARING

A. SCHOOL PORTION OF:

Resolution RE: Fiscal Year 2003 Budget Appropriations, Property Taxes and Fees. Sponsored by Mayor Alexander G. Nossiff, by Request.

Mayor Nossiff opened the public hearing asking if anyone wished to speak:

Patty Bandouveres, 31 Cranbrook Lane – has a 2nd grader at Horne Street School and feels that the proposed school budget would allow her sons' current teacher to follow him to the next grade in a proposed looping program. She stated her son has an auditory condition and feels that the sizes of the classroom of 19 allowed the teacher to pick up on the fact he was having learning issues. She said that although legally classes can go up to 30 people, even with aides or other adults, smaller class size is more beneficial to learning.

Dana Boudreau, 9 Northam Drive – volunteers at school – main concern is the proposal of level funding and the impact it will have. It seems like the conservative thing to do to hold taxes, but it will not allow us to meet our contractual obligations as well as not allowing the staffing of the classrooms currently being constructed. Children can't be here to speak for themselves, but they are the ones being affected. He stated that we shouldn't try to lower the tax rate at the expense of the education of the children. Extracurricular activities are already being funded outside, so can't be cut to save money. The school budget currently as proposed will only be 75 cents.

Jack Calabrese, 20 Florence Street – also has children in Horne Street School – came to Dover after being raised in Boston and schools were crowded, and came here because it wasn't and doesn't want it go away. Larger classrooms are harder to control. Provide children with best opportunities that we can, disappointed with Councilor Quigley who ran on safety and education quoted fosters 10/24/01. Quigley called point of order and asked that comments not be directed to one person.

Susan Redden– 2 Pinecrest Lane – has a 4th and 3rd grader at WPS, is an aide at the school and feels that at this point it is hard to keep control of classes as it is with aides and would be even more so with 30 kids and one teacher.

Chris Wyskiel, 15 Lexington Street – business owner, lawyer, parent – does not have a problem paying taxes that are fair and predictable – feels also that classroom size is important and applauds the school board for trying to keep that in control. When his

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children started school he was told by others not to send his kids to Woodman Park Schools, but feels they have had a great two years. Feels that classroom size is a great motivator for the teachers and makes them more professional. He would gladly pay a couple of bucks a week to keep our education system at its current standards.

Michelle Beauchesne – 15 Florence Street – also spoke in favor of the budget as presented.

Kathryn Markel – 51 Park Street- read a statement – has been involved as a substitute and volunteer at schools for 3 years with 30 years of teaching experience. She feels the Dover schools are excellent and teachers are dedicated and the teachers are there many additional hours without pay. Level funding will cut staffing levels and will eliminate any new programs and asked the Council to please don't fail to fund children's future.

Judy Fitzpatrick, 6 Cross Street – children at Horne Street, volunteers – we need to meet our contractual obligations and to staff the extra classrooms being built to accommodate the additional children – not to mention the special needs children. Also moved here from Massachusetts because of the Dover schools. 75 cents is not a lot to spend on our children, they aren't cattle, give them what they need.

June Ellison, 36 New York Street, teacher at DALC, has students who can't read, which is a result of the poor early education. Some people actually get through school with diploma without reading and asked the Council to support the budget as presented.

Emily Wood, 32 Governor Sawyer Lane – stated this is a great city and should be a great place for great teachers to come too. City is growing bigger and we should not let our schools fall behind. Contracts that are signed should be honored, let it be known that Dover values its students. Pass budget in tact.

Nancy Moore, 2 Cherokee Street – has e-mailed councilors regarding the elimination of the 3rd grade position at Horne street and was told by some that they should contact school board but feels that they are passing the buck.

Stephanie Keegan, 58 Cherrywood Drive – is very impressed with the schools in Dover which have worked hard to improve the standards and has come at a remarkably low price and should be given the opportunity to continue. Cutting the budget would mean sliding back down the hill which was very difficult to climb. She has a great deal of hope for this community which comes from the children and the educators.

Fran Meffin, 16 Benjamin Way – works in the schools and feels that there is an utmost amount of pride in the system. The impact of improper funding is immeasurable to the students and teachers in a negative way. She feels that part of the battle needs to be brought back to the State for more funding.

Ron Huml- 71 Mast Road – stated he has read the budget and there is \$1 million hidden for one time expenses in the last budget, which are still there.

He further explained the mathematics and then related a story about someone who couldn't afford their prescription medication and now we are hitting them with more taxes.

Dorothea Hooper, 84 Katie Lane – School Board member and taxpayer – understands people who can't afford to pay more taxes and don't want to drive them out of their homes. But she is also concerned about the education system especially the drop out rate, and feels that the early years are where we need to start and the class size is the key. Teachers are expected to be all things to all children and they can't be. She said the school board presented a no frills no fat budget, which goes to class size, special needs and addresses discipline in the schools. Can't sustain level funding the budget.

Peter Wotten, 12 Apache Street – has 2 children in Horne street school, concerned with level funding. It would actually be a cut. 3rd grade position being cut will mean 26-30 students in those classes, urges council to support budget as presented which the school board worked extremely hard to be fair to all. Currently 1456 kids at Dover High, next year 1540, summer months another 70 students can enroll last minute and student teacher ratio is highest in all surrounding communities.

Matt Mayberry, 410 Dover Point Road – doesn't envy Council who have a tough decision, but feels the 69 cents is better spent now than later when they have to correct the problems that it will create.

Patricia Danforth, 25 Westwood Circle – passes many new, large developments on the way home and doesn't understand what is going on in this city. She taught with 39 kids in a classroom and understands the need for small class-size and asked the Council to listen to the Superintendent who is a professional to make these decisions.

Jean Carignan, 67 Longhill Road – has 3rd grader who was in a large classroom and although the teacher was excellent, she couldn't physically attend to all children. Title one help doesn't do the job either. Don't let it happen to next 3rd grade class.

Dan McCooley, 59 Fieldstone Drive, taxpayer, teacher, union president – feels school board and Mr. LaSelva did a great job bringing in this budget for a 75 cent increase. He stated that there is a contractual obligation already in place and there has never been an overturned contract in Dover, and asked the Council to honor the 4%. Blue Cross Blue Shield situation is out of control with 20% raise in health care. Another issue is the class size, which is a big problem as research has been done to prove smaller classes do work. He then discussed the image issue that Dover has to work on improving in education and feels it is a credibility issue. He stated that an article in Foster's caused a candidate to withdraw her application because of the instability being portrayed. He feels that we need to make people feel comfortable enough to leave good positions to come to Dover. He then talked about when Councilor Christenbury and Mayor Nossiff were at Dover High School there were 19 students in room 209 and currently there are 30 students in room 209.

Victoria Morris, 42 Ash Street – 4th grader at Horne Street, stated that too many kids stress out the teachers.

Doris Grady, 42 Longhill Road – School Board member – stated she feels like the parent of 4,000 students of the city and is concerned with level funding. She stated that school isn't the same as when we were in school as they didn't have the federal mandates, special ed mandates, mainstreaming, inclusion, behavior problems, drugs, alcohol, etc. She stated that because of these problems, costs will escalate. She knows that early in the process there were 3 board members and 3 councilors who sat down to decide how to approach the budget and agreed that 75 cents was reasonable. There was already 1.5 million built in by contract obligations. She continued by stating that teachers have a more difficult time and require aids to help. Next, she stated she went to Camp Sun and Fun for the dedication of the new building today and saw the two old modulars which she begged them to get rid of at the schools. She stated this was finally accomplished by building the middle school. She was appalled to know we let children sit in those two buildings to learn. She thought the middle school was going to hold 1,200 but only holds 1,000 and there are already 1180 in the school, not counting any new residents who come in. She concluded by asking the Council to not level fund, and stated that if they have to cut, they should do it fairly.

Karen Gray, 574 Sixth Street – son is being moved from WPS to Horne Street due to redistricting because of the class sizes and feels that this needs to be remembered.

Nancy Watkins, 37 Cataract Avenue – has 3 children in schools and also substitutes. She stated that it is an eye-opener to spend time in the schools. She stated that we should give teachers pay, supplies and support to provide the education children deserve.

Kimberly Faustino, 66A Piscataqua Road – has children in the Garrison School system and is a substitute teacher, agrees that everyone should see how it is to be in the classroom as it is very enlightening. She stated that there is one reading specialist at Garrison for 500 students who is stretched to limit. Volunteers help, but don't fulfill the need. They have been waiting for years for additional reading support and does not want any larger class sizes.

Dennis Bentley, WPS Principal, stated that he is requesting to keep the additional 3rd grade teacher as there will be 26 per class without it. He stated that the 3rd grade is a state mandated testing year and it is important to have the smaller classes the children deserve. He also discussed the fact that he has lost good teaching candidates due to the perceived instability within the City for teachers at budget time. He stated that he feels the real estate agents are touting the Dover school system because the improvements have been great and we should keep it going.

Charmin Price – stated she is not a resident, but is the Dover Adult Learning Center president – She stated in 2 weeks they will be graduating the largest GED class in their history. She stated that the need will always be there, but although money is not the sole contributing factor, she urges the council to take into account the pleas from parents to keep class sizes down for learning.

Rick Brillard, 167 Varney Road – feels that the problem is the development occurring unchecked and will only exacerbate the problem for the future and cost more and more.

Seeing no-one else wishing to speak, the Mayor closed the public hearing. 7:40 p.m.

RESOLUTION:

- A. Resolution RE: Collective Bargaining Agreement Between the City of Dover and the IAFF- Local 1312 (International Association of Firefighters). Sponsored by Mayor Alexander G. Nossiff by Request.

Taylor moved to adopt, seconded by Tweedie.

Passed 8-0 roll call vote.

- B. Resolution RE: Collective Bargaining Agreement Between the City of Dover and the DPAA (Dover Police Administrators Association). Sponsored by Mayor Alexander G. Nossiff by Request.

Taylor moved to adopt, seconded by Tweedie.
Motion passed on an 8-0 vote.

3. OTHER BUSINESS

Tweedie asked that the July 3rd workshop be cancelled due to the 4th of July holiday. Mr. Beecher explained that nothing had been scheduled.

4. ADJOURNMENT

Quigley moved to adjourn, seconded by Taylor.
Motion passed unanimously.

The Mayor called a five-minute recess and then reconvened for the workshop.

WORKSHOP

DISCUSSION RE:

1. BUDGET OVERVIEW

Mayor Nossiff explained that this is the first opportunity for the Council to decide how to approach the budget i.e., Department Head recommendations, line-by-line, combo of both. He reminded everyone that he can't vote.

Next he expressed his appreciation to all those people who came out to speak as well as the school board members in attendance. He warned that he is concerned about the hypothesis being given regarding the level funded budget impact and Mr. Beecher will be bringing those figures to them tomorrow.

He stated that the Council has made no votes yet and that many hours have gone into reviewing the budget. He also admires the job the superintendent and school board have done, feels it is remarkable. He stated that no one that he has spoken to wants to shirk their responsibility to children, but given the current situation at the state level, feels we can't ignore economic realities and must keep all citizens in mind.

Christenbury stated he would like to address the school portion first because everyone is here. He feels the best approach is for each councilor to bring up any specifics that they want removed, but not address everything else.

Tweedie stated he is still in the research process and needs numbers from the Finance Director. We are bottom line authority on the school budget, and he needs numbers to make decisions.

Dunnington feels that we have hired extremely competent people to make these decisions. He stated the Council should look at the total budget and impact and deal with both sides together. He stated the City Manager will have to make decisions.

Whitmore stated she also needs more numbers. She has gone through line by line and there can be unintended consequences by making these cuts.

Hindle has followed the school board for the last 3 years going over their budget line by line. We have only until the 15th and it is now the 5th, so we can't go line by line.

Consensus is to not go line by line.

The Mayor then asked if there are any recommendations for an amount to cut.

Christenbury stated that he and Councilor Tweedie sponsored a resolution to form the Joint Fiscal Impact committee which was meant to avoid the last minute decision making during the budget process by bringing school board and councilors together to make recommendations. He stated that he concurs with School Board Member Doris Grady that the committee agreed with a 75 cent increase. He stated that the school board started early in the process and no body told them they would get nothing when they were asking for guidance. He stated that he knows and trusts Nick Skaltsis which is what it comes down to and feels the community has given that trust. The School Board was charged with improving the system and he will support their request, with the following caveat. He would like to cut 300,000 but allow them to keep 100,000 in reserve, which will bring it down to a 69-cent increase.

He continued by stating that he will give a finder's fee to anyone who can show him the 1 million that is hidden in the budget. He stated that it is all in the personnel on the school side and he has heard about the supposed 1 million in one time expenses that are supposedly still in the budget. He gave bag and tag as an example of not giving back the money that they said was going to be saved and can't tell the school to do something different than we are doing.

The Mayor clarified Councilor Christenbury's recommendation.

Hofemann said he wants to level fund because seniors can't afford any more and the assessed value is supposed to be at 90 percent but is only at 80 percent and will only increase.

Dunnington has no problem with trimming fat but don't cut meat off the bone, which is what level funding will do. The building of houses causes more children in schools and we have to deal with it. He feels that some people don't understand what level funding actually is.

Nossiff asked his view of Christenbury's proposal.

Dunnington feels our most valuable asset is our children. He stated the School Board has spent countless hours already and feels we should support this as presented to maintain the level of education we have.

Quigley asked how that reflects on the percentage of the tax rate as he feels it doesn't feel that it comes down to 69 cents.

Beecher explained that the health care increase didn't come back as high as projected, and brought it down by 13 cents which goes towards the school budget also. He stated he feels we can only speak in generalities until it is set by the state.

Quigley feels level funding was that in the event that electricity goes up, it has to be covered. Same with oil, contracts, etch and he disagrees that anyone has said that we weren't going to honor the contracts. He supports \$1.00 increase, which is level funding to him as it supports current levels.

He feels that there was a lot of hype here tonight about losing teachers, but they haven't looked at teachers retiring that will save money and over the past 6 years there have been a tremendous amount of staff added and another 11 proposed this year. Everyone agreed that we needed to cut spending. Some people got hit twice with the increase and the assessment. Seniors can't afford more on fixed income and we have to look at the total picture. He feels that 40 cents is enough of an increase for the city side.

Total \$1.00 increase will make it work. No one is looking to breach the contract and there is other money to pay for the new teachers.

Hindle explained that last year there were significant cuts that were proposed and the superintendent was asked specifically to report on the impact of cutting 200,000, 500,000 etc. He stated he would like him to do so again. He is honored to represent Ward 5, and knows the demographics of his ward includes Dover Adult Learning Center, Woodman Park School, Dover High School and Dover Middle School, and he ran on a platform of prioritization, which is that the children get the best education they deserve. He has attended every workshop but 1, in the last 3 years, and has asked the question regarding the cuts and feels that they can best answer those questions. He feels that the representation of parents coming out to speak proves that people love the education system in Dover. He agrees that the state situation is bad and that the federal government owes us money.

He discussed the special education requirements at the elementary schools and the fact that the schools are at capacity, which is being rectified by adding on to the facilities. The cost of building a new elementary school compared to renovating the McConnell Center are big, and by renovating that, we will have significant additional space. He fully supports Christenbury's proposal. He then thanked the parents who spoke and the e-mails and phone calls he has received. He stated he has never seen amount of parental support than he saw this evening. He stated that is the dedicated staff at the schools who motivated the parents to contact the councilors. He concluded by stating that the city should not move backwards, but forwards.

Tweedie stated he is not prepared to talk numbers, but philosophically, it boils down to spending. Mathematical formulas go up and down accordingly and we are talking about quality of life in Dover. Level funding will decrease and then bring down property values. He stated the question is do we want to raise responsible citizens with quality education, firefighters, police, etc.

Nossiff is requesting that Harrington be present on June 12th. He is disappointed he is not here tonight.

Whitmore stated she never promised to level fund a budget. She stated she does not consider level funding accounting for built in increases. She encouraged other councilors to visit the schools and see the reality and not just look at the numbers.

Discussion then ensued regarding the effects of level funding vs. \$1.00 increase.

Whitmore stated she wants people to understand the impacts, which would include 2 options; eliminate programs, or dilute across the board services.

Nossiff stated his view of level funding is level funding and feels we can't view the budget in a vacuum, we need to look at it historically. In 1993 the school budget was at 33 million, it was 76,000,00 in the late '90's, and now at it is at 150,000,000. He stated there is a time to retreat and he gave examples of surrounding communities facing the same dilemma. He feels that everyone is actually on the same page and agrees with Dunnington who said we have to prepare for growth, but feels the question is speed. He said we need to look at the affordability of providing quality education, but this is not Framingham or Brookline Massachusetts, we are working class people and blue-collar people need to be considered.

He continued that historically increases have been 3-5%, but the last 2 years it has been 10-12% and we have gotten ahead of ourselves, and therefore we need to see what level funding will be considering this fact of overspending. He stated he has never said he won't back the contracts, but we have over funded by 100% over the last 2 years. He is Mr. LaSelva's biggest fan, and has given him what he has asked for. He commended teachers, parents, but that isn't the point. He doesn't feel anything has shown that we can't level fund nor legitimately seen this effect and until then can't say. Tomorrow Mr. Beecher will present this information to the Council. It is inevitable that government will have to act like a business, including contracts. Private enterprise priority is job security and not raises and he feels employees must be willing to give something back to avoid layoffs.

Hofemann agrees 2000%, but said there are new programs being voted on the 10th of this month, why.

Tweedie, disagrees about increases, but does agree that we have had a lot of growth. He agrees also that schools aren't the same as before and we should be encouraging newer, better programs. We need to study how we spend our energy monies that continually go up and need to focus on things we can control. We need to keep the people we have to run this city and feels we can't move forward if we maintain status quo.

Hindle asked for superintendent again. He then discussed 3 years ago we could have rezoned, but only spot rezoning was done, and is why we have too much building. Planning board is looking to rezone again for business and industry to bring jobs here.

Christenbury stated that there have been 4 definitions of level-funding so far, and feels this is confusing to the public. He clarified level spending to level funding. Level tax rate – built in cost is actually status quo budget adding in fixed costs, inflationary budget. He thanked Hindle for mentioning the rezoning issue. People have the right to build homes and we can't stop them if it is zoned. The City Council is responsible for the growth that created this increased need in education.

Lastly, regarding assessed value, last year changed because certain categories of homes got raised because they weren't up to par with others. Now we don't have a classification issue, we have an adjustment issue, which is necessary across the board.

People have to know the dollar amount to budget for it and is how they judge their quality of life. Feels we have confused people tonight. We are at 11th hour.

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Dunnington discussed the historic perspective of the Councils that didn't spend money, but then we had to make up for it. He supports the school board request because there is a crunch coming because of the development.

Nossiff asked what Hindle wants to ask Mr. LaSelva.

Jason said we want to know what the impact of various cuts will have on his budget.

Mr. LaSelva explained that 3 years ago there was a high increase, last year was lower, and this year even lower. He stated he hasn't given any thought where he will cut 300,000. Philosophy is being spoken about tonight, and his is that the teacher is the most important part of system, and new positions are not for new programs, they are to meet current needs that we aren't able to meet now. Reading specialist, 3rd grade teacher; etc. He stated he will not cut staffing and will fill those positions that have direct impact on improving existing instruction programs.

He stated we can't improve with 30 students in a classroom. 5 periods a day for a teacher would then be teaching 150 kids a day. He stated we should stay above water and not sink further.

Discussion ensued regarding the impact of various amounts to be cut.

Tweedie moved to adjourn, seconded unanimously.

Adjourned at 9:30 PM

Valerie A. French
Deputy City Clerk