

GREENFIELD TOWN COUNCIL
Special Meeting Minutes
February 25, 2008

Greenfield High School Cafeteria

6:00 p.m.

CALL TO ORDER: Meeting was called to order at 7:05 p.m. by President Maloney.

ROLL CALL OF MEMBERS: Roll Call was taken all Town Councilors were present.

ALSO PRESENT: Mayor Christine Forgey; Director of Municipal Finance and Administration Marjorie L. Kelly; Town Accountant Michel Kociela; Town Clerk Maureen Winseck; Greenfield School Superintendent Marcia Evans; Four Corners School Principal Gail Healy; Greenfield High School Principal Nancy Athas; Greenfield Middle School Principal Christopher Collins; Greenfield School Committee Chairman Greg Aubin; School Committee members Doris Doyle and Dalton Athey; Police Chief David Guilbault; Fire Chief Mark Cogswell; Fire Deputy Chief Robert Strahan; Franklin County Chamber of Commerce Ann Hamilton; Greenfield Business Association Rebecca Kurber; Greenfield School Teachers, Students and Staff; Anita Fritz and Peter McDonald, the *Recorder*; Hugh Massey, WHAI; Dave Vallette, the *Republican*; GCTV-15 staff; and members of the public.

MOTION: On a motion by Councilor Farrell, second by Councilor Guin, it was unanimously

VOTED: THAT IT BE ORDERED, THAT THE GREENFIELD TOWN COUNCIL SUSPENDS THE RULES OF PROCEDURE, RULE 8, IN ORDER TO DISPOSE OF BUSINESS AS WRITTEN ON THE ATTACHED AGENDA DATED FEBRUARY 25, 2008.

Mayor Forgey presented details regarding the current deficit in the Greenfield Public School Budget. She requested the Town Council approve of the \$ 500,000.00 transfer for the budget gap.

Ms. Kelly presented her perspective of the Town Finance Department as it relates to the current deficit in the Greenfield Public School Budget.

Chairman Aubin reviewed the time line beginning with the creation of the Fiscal Year 2008 budget to present.

Interim Superintendent Evans reviewed five graphs regarding the School Department budget expenditures. The graphs showed budget information pertaining to Grants, Circuit Breaker and Revolving Fund Accounts.

The following answers were given in response to Town Councilor questions:

- The Schools have approximately \$489,000.00 in the School Choice Revolving Fund.
- SPED Circuit breaker will receive approximately \$559,000.00 for the Fiscal Year 2008 School year.
- The schools may realize approximately \$ 50,000.00 in savings relative to the phone system and billing.
- Electric and Oil accounts look to be “a wash” for the budgeted amounts.
- Any overages in utilities would be covered by a Reserve Fund Transfer.
- There was approximate \$270,000 currently in the Reserve Fund Account.
- Fiscal Year 2008 student enrolment number was 1,708 students. Fiscal Year 2007 student enrolment number was 1,817 students.
- Sick leave and Substitute teaching payments come from different accounts. Teachers can retire any time during the year. At the time of retirement, sick leave would be calculated and paid to the retiree.

Councilor Joseph held a second reading:

- To reclassify the Middle School Stabilization Fund to a General Stabilization Fund and to appropriate \$500,000.00 from Stabilization to the FY2008 Greenfield Public School budget.

PUBLIC HEARINGS:

Councilor Joseph read the Public Hearing notice:

In accordance with the Home Rule Charter, the Greenfield Town Council will hold a public hearing on Monday, February 25, 2008, beginning at 6:00 p.m. at Greenfield Police Department Meeting Room, 321 High Street to consider the following:

- To reclassify the Middle School Stabilization Fund to a General Stabilization Fund and to appropriate \$500,000.00 from Stabilization to the FY2008 Greenfield Public School budget.

President Maloney opened the Public Hearing at 7:00 pm.

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The following people spoke in favor of the reclassification and appropriation.

- Jeanette Lawrence, Teacher Greenfield High School.
- Stephen Jakub, 43 Wildwood Ave, Teacher, Greenfield High School.
- Sandra Bevacqua, 65 High St , former Guidance Administrative Assistant laid off due to the fiscal crisis.
- Pam Kinsmith, 93 Homestead Ave.
- Rachel Cronen-Townsend, 51 Madison Circle, Greenfield Teacher.
- Chip Bull, President, Greenfield Education Association, Greenfield Middle School Teacher.
- Senior, Greenfield High School.
- Junior, Greenfield High School.
- Ellen Villani, 69 Meridian St, Coalition for Local Schools.
- Roxanne Wedegartner, 85 Hastings St, former Chair of the School Committee.
- Sue Gunsalus, 47 Grove St., Co-chair of the Newton Street PTO.
- Dianne Allis, 19 Oak St, Greenfield Teacher.
- Junior, Greenfield High School.
- David Levitt, 4 Fairview Terrace.
- Greenfield High School Student.
- Mark Leonard, Orchard St., resident, Teacher, Greenfield High School.
- Tara Cloutier, resident, Teacher, Greenfield High School.
- Maryann Calderwood, resident, Teacher, Greenfield High School.
- Ann Mastrototaro, resident.
- Gretchen Emond, resident.

Students invited the Town Council and School Committee to a round table discussion with concerned Greenfield High School students. Information will follow.

President Maloney closed the Public Hearing at 8:01 pm. He clarified the following:

- The Town Council had zero authority on how the schools funds are spent or cuts which are made.
- Those decisions are made by the Superintendent and School Committee.
- School Committee meetings and Public Hearing are the perfect time for people to attend and voice concerns or ideas.
- The discussion and meetings held in Fiscal Year 2007 regarding a Proposition 2 ½ override.
- The information presented tonight was the first time the Town Council heard this information.
- The Town Council found out about the school deficit when the public did.

President Maloney called for a recess at 8:08 pm.

President Maloney called the meeting back to order at 8:18 pm.

Mr. McLaughlin stated an actual estimated deficit was \$1,100,000.00. Superintendent Evans suggested the School would have a firm deficit number by the end of April.

The following responses were given to Town Council questions:

- Policy has been changed. Principals would oversee more of their school budgets.
- The \$150,000.00 Reserve Fund Transfer for School utilities would be done at the end of this Fiscal Year.
- Additional funds will be requested for health and safety maintenance issues at almost all of the schools.
- As a good faith effort the town has requested the School Department pay back the \$ 500,000.00 beginning in 2010 and ending in 2017.
- Legally, there was nothing in the law that could force the School Department to pay these funds back to the Town.
- The original sick leave line item was \$60,000.00. The sick leave buyback line item was over -budget by \$100,000.00.
- Although student enrolment has decreased, teaching positions have remained basically the same.
- An organization would attend a meeting on Thursday, February 28, 2008, to discuss marketing the Greenfield School System to attract students to choice-in to Greenfield schools.
- The transition time between the Interim Superintendent and Business Manager was a critical time. Normally, there would be at least three (3) people working to close out the fiscal year, the new budget, and reports to the state. However this year there was only one (1) person doing all of these tasks.

- With the additional funds proposed this evening, the School Department would realize approximately a 4% increase in their overall budget.
- The former Superintendent of Schools was on the payroll through August 31, 2007. The Interim Superintendent was put on payroll on August 1, 2007. The former Business Manager remained on payroll through the middle of October, although he left the district in August. This was authorized by the former Superintendent.
- The School Committee learned the Business Manager had remained on the payroll until August at the end of the year.
- Greenfield received approximately \$3,500,000.00 in grant funds.
- If an employee had been paid by a grant, the employee pay may be paid by the Town, but that would require the loss of an alternate position.
- There was no bus available to get High School students to school. High School students are bussed home.
- Discussed the thought process and priorities for first and second round cuts.
- If the School department doesn't pay back the \$500,000.00 loan, it would not immediately affect the tax rate. The long range plan (year 2012) was to use these funds to reduce the tax rate.
- There was an accountability process in place which the school committee has not been using it.
- Consolidation of school financial functions would be done as soon as possible, although a date has not been set. Based on the current information, an early guess would be January 2009 for the beginning of consolidation.
- M.G.L.c 37 M allows for consolidation of specific Town and School administrative functions.

President Maloney stated the Town Council would now debate the issue.

MOTION: On a motion by Councilor Allis, second by Councilor Farrell, it was

MOVED: APPROVE A RESERVE FUND TRANSFER OF \$150,000.00 TO ADDRESS THE SCHOOL DEPARTMENTS UTILITY OVERRUN ISSUE.

DISCUSSION: Councilor Wisnewski would vote in favor of this order. President Maloney stated if three (3) Town Councilors object, the vote cannot be taken this evening. Councilors Martin, Lashier, and Farrell objected to voting on this order tonight.

President Maloney noted the order would not be voted.

MOTION: On a motion by Councilor Joseph, second by Councilor Farrell, it was unanimously

MOVED: THAT IT BE ORDERED, THE TOWN OF GREENFIELD CHANGES THE GREENFIELD MIDDLE SCHOOL STABILIZATION FUND TO A GENERAL STABILIZATION FUND.

DISCUSSION: Mayor Forgey stated the funds were originally placed in the Middle School Stabilization fund so they would not be used as a general fund for the budget. Stabilization funds are funds to be used "on a rainy day." Mayor Forgey stated "it was pouring out" and Greenfield was in a very difficult position. She stated it was important to use the money to get the kids through, although Fiscal Year 2009 would not be easy. Councilor Odato stated the Mayor's eleven (11) point plan "had no teeth." President Maloney clarified if this order was not approved, the second order to transfer funds would be moot. Councilors Wisnewski, Guin, Allis, Siano, Joseph and Lashier would vote to approve this order to allow for further discussion.

It was unanimously,

VOTED: THAT IT BE ORDERED, THE TOWN OF GREENFIELD CHANGES THE GREENFIELD MIDDLE SCHOOL STABILIZATION FUND TO A GENERAL STABILIZATION FUND.

MOTION: On a motion by Councilor Joseph, second by Councilor Guin, it was

MOVED: THAT IT BE ORDERED, THE SUM OF \$500,000.00 BE TRANSFERRED FROM THE GENERAL STABILIZATION FUND TO THE SCHOOL DEPARTMENT BUDGET FOR FISCAL YEAR 2008.

DISCUSSION: Councilor Odato stated the School Committee has already broken rule one (1) of the eleven (11) point plan. He spoke of additional language in the plan that was "a toothless tiger." He noted the majority of comments he has received from the public have been to not give the schools something for nothing. He was as close to a "no" vote as he could get. We need to be accountable for this issue and to set an example for the students. Councilor Siano stated students need an education and we need to support our schools. Councilor Joseph reviewed the meetings he had attended regarding the School

deficit. He noted during those meetings most of the discussion emphasized the cuts made should have a minimum effect on students. Councilor Joseph would begrudgingly vote in favor of this order. Councilor Letourneau acknowledged there was only so much money to go around. People should speak to their State Representatives regarding state funding of schools. She would also begrudgingly vote in favor of this order. Councilor Martin noted the Legislative body was responsible for the spending or not spending of the town funds. The town can continue to have the spending in contracts that are currently in use by the School. Spending was totally out of control. He stated it was not the time to vote in favor of the \$500,000.00. The vote should be taken in five (5) weeks or so when the School Administration brings a plan to the Council to control there funds. Councilor Guin suggested if the Town can weather through this, it could be one of the best things to happen because now we are receiving information from the Schools. Councilor Guin would vote in favor of this order. Councilor Wisnewski emphasized it was time to stop talking about the problem and fix it. He was in favor of a control board and accountability. Councilor Wisnewski would vote in favor of the order. Councilor Allis does want the school to receive the funds needed to operate. Councilor Allis was leaning towards a no vote although he could be convinced otherwise. Councilor McLellan liked the idea of a control board. He would vote in favor of the order. Councilor Lashier would vote in favor of the order. However, he will be looking for changes to happen. He stated the people on the street encouraged him to vote against the order. Councilor Farrell noted the majority of the people who have spoken to him have told him to vote no for this order. He would vote in favor of the order. Councilor Vieu had lost trust in the School Department. She was incredibly uncomfortable and worried about the appropriation of funds. She would vote in favor of the order. Councilor Martin expressed disappointment with the Town Councilors this evening. Councilor Odato would vote to approve the order. President Maloney reviewed the following:

- The State ranked Towns' and Cities' ability to pay for things such as Fire Trucks, Police Protection, Schools, DPW, etc. Greenfield ranked from year to year in the bottom ten percent (10%). Greenfield School per-pupil spending ranks middle in the state.
- Fiscal Year 2009 Chapter 70 and Local Aid distributions will not increase. They would decrease if the casinos do not get approved.
- The limited funds available to all town departments in the event of unforeseen expenses.
- Announced the town was very close to being bankrupt.

Councilor Allis disclosed that his mother worked for the School Department.

It was by roll call, 11 yes and 1 no.

VOTED: THAT IT BE ORDERED, THE SUM OF \$500,000.00 BE TRANSFERRED FROM THE GENERAL STABILIZATION FUND TO THE SCHOOL DEPARTMENT BUDGET FOR FISCAL YEAR 2008.

ADJOURNMENT: On a motion by Councilor Farrell, second by Councilor Allis, it was unanimously **VOTED:** TO ADJOURN THE MEETING AT 10:55 P.M.

A true copy,

Attest: _____
Maureen T. Winseck, Town Clerk

GREENFIELD TOWN COUNCIL MEMBERS

Greenfield High School Cafeteria
Special Meeting
February 25, 2008

1.	Lashier, Dennis	P	Y					
2.	McLellan, Thomas	P	Y					
3.	Allis, Brickett	P	Y					
4.	Maloney, Mark	P	---					
5.	Wisnewski, Mark	P	Y					
6.	Letourneau, Danielle	P	Y					
7.	Martin, William	P	N					
8.	Joseph, Christopher	P	Y					
9.	Vieu, Sara	P	Y					
10.	Farrell, Timothy	P	Y					
11.	Guin, Daniel	P	Y					
12.	Siano, Alfred	P	Y					
13.	Odato, Marc	P	Y					