

Minutes
Lincoln Finance Committee
Town Offices 2nd Floor Meeting Room
September 25, 2018
9:00 am

Present: Gina Halsted, Jim Hutchinson (Chair), Nancy Marshall and Andy Payne (vice-Chair)

Absent: Jeff Birchby, Tom Sander and Elisa Sartori

Also in attendance: Jennifer Glass, Board of Selectman; Audrey Kalmus, Capital Planning Committee; Carole Kasper, L/S School Committee; Colleen Wilkins, Finance Director; Bella Wong, Superintendent and Principal, Lincoln/Sudbury Regional High School

The meeting was called to order at 9:02am.

Bella Wong opened the meeting by thanking those in attendance and providing a history of the building located at 420 Lincoln Rd. in Sudbury. Used as a pre-school for many years, the building, which is adjacent to the high school, has been closed because of operational and building code reasons. The district has been considering ways to restore the facility. In past years, the School Committee has approved the use of maintenance funds to remove asbestos, repair the roof, replace rotting beams, remove an oil tank and chimney. The building is gutted and water tight, but not operational.

Over the summer of 2018, the L/S Director of Student Services identified a number of students with social and emotional disabilities who will be entering the high school from the 8th grades. Some number of these students may require out-of-district placements to accommodate their disabilities. The District has spent around \$5 million for out-of-district placements over the past couple of years.

Ms. Wong continued to explain a proposal to create an in-district program for students with Social & Emotional needs to be located in the 420 Lincoln Rd. building. She explained that there were educational and financial benefits to bringing the students back into the district. Tuition for out-of-district daytime placements averages \$50K/year per student and transportation costs \$12K on average.

Ms. Wong explained that the request is to use \$350K from Excess & Deficiency Fund (E&D) to repair the building and outfit it for the program. The program will require \$300K in annual operating costs to get running. The district is applying for a grant to cover the costs of a clinical counselor, which would reduce the annual cost. The program would break even on operating costs if three students are enrolled. The project is forecasted to break even within a year. Ms. Wong explained that Out-of-District costs would continue to be carried in the budget for the first year until students committed to attend the in-house program.

Jim Hutchinson asked where the students were placed if they required out-of-district services. Ms. Wong explained that there were several possible options, including collaboratives,

depending on the needs of the student. Audrey Kalmus asked about the 58 students who require residential placements. Ms. Wong stated that this proposal would not be focusing on the needs of those students.

Mr. Hutchinson observed that the proposal seems appears to make conservative assumptions. The proposed program has a capacity of 20-24 students, but the proposal is assuming 10 students for the first year.

Mr. Hutchinson asked if the budget would continue to carry the Out-of-District costs after the first year. He expressed a concern about replenishing E&D. After some discussion, Ms. Wong agreed that after the first year there will be a better sense of the enrollments, so there may not be the need to carry Out-of-District costs in the budget. Nancy Marshall asked when the district would get an indication of the number of students who will enroll in the program. Ms. Wong referenced the past three years of data, showing 14-17 students per year requiring services for social/emotional needs. That data, she stated, gives a good sense of the trend. Mr. Hutchinson wondered what would happen if the breakeven point took longer than a year. Ms. Wong responded that the tuition and transportation lines in the budget would be reduced to reflect usage of the program.

Jennifer Glass asked about the process for establishing and advertising the program. She wondered if outreach had been done to the families. Ms. Wong stated reluctance to pre-announce a program that was not created yet. She explained how the proposed program is an extension of the current EXCEL program, which is currently overenrolled. Historically, when a special services program (such as ACE and BEACON) was announced, enrollment in those programs was robust. She stated that the district has a positive record for building quality programs and there is demand for the services.

Andy Payne wondered if other districts have offered similar programs off site, but close to the high school. Ms. Wong referenced programs in Newton, Bedford, Brookline and Concord. Ms. Marshall shared how some students who are currently in out-of-district programs have a desire to be partially involved in the school and to return in their community. Ms. Wong added that re-entry to the mainstream may be easier for some students because of the proximity.

Ms. Kalmus asked why the funds for the refurbishment were not coming out of a capital budget request. Ms. Wong explained that the proposal was consistent with the E&D policy that was recently approved. That policy stipulates that E&D funds are to be used for one-off projects. Additionally, Ms. Wong noted, she is aware of 9 8th graders who are entering the district and will require the services of this program. This number of students motivates her to be proactive and try to be prepared to offer services to the students in the fall of 2019. Ms. Wong added that using the E&D funds in the near future would allow time to restore the fund level for new fields, which is a forecasted need. The current level of the E&D budget is just under \$1M.

Ms. Marshall asked if the grant application is for one year or three years? Ms. Wong replied that it is for one year but could be used for up to three years.

Ms. Wong explained the next steps in the approval process. Ms. Wong will be presenting to the Lincoln/Sudbury School Committee tomorrow (September 26th). If the School Committee

approves the use of the E&D funds for this project, Ms. Wong is suggesting that they agree not to use the funds until the Board of Selectmen in Lincoln and Sudbury have approved the proposal. If the BOS decide the proposal is an appropriate use of E&D funds they can either take no further action (in which case it defaults as being approved) or they can create a warrant article to be voted on at Town Meeting.

The Lincoln Board of Selectmen will discuss the proposal on Monday, October 1, so will know the L/S School Committee's decision.

Ms. Glass asked if there were any other capital requests on the horizon. Ms. Wong shared that a new Kubota truck is a capital request. The roof will also require attention in about 5 years.

Ms. Marshall shared that the feedback on the Beacon program (another Special Education offering at the school) has been very popular. Ms. Wong noted that the Beacon program decreased Out-of-District day placements by 50%.

Mr. Payne asked for clarification of the intention to replenish the E&D fund. Ms. Wong explained her motivation to replenish E&D because of other needs. Mr. Payne observed that the Lincoln's share of the funding is around \$40K. Mr. Hutchinson concurred and added that special education costs are high and that this is a material improvement.

Nancy Marshall made a motion to recommend to the Board of Selectman to support the project as proposed. Mr. Payne seconded. The motion was approved unanimously.

The committee discussed the next step of the BOS decision.

The meeting adjourned at 9:57am

Submitted by: Gina Halsted

Approved: