

Town Council Meeting
April 1, 2013

Work Session With School Committee for FY 2013/2014

Present at work session were Councilwoman Carlson, Councilman Laboissonniere, Vice-President Kerry McGee, Councilman Ted Jendzejec, President Gary Cote, Solicitor Tobin, Manager Hoover, Superintendent Michael Almeida, Finance Director Robyn Pelletier

Superintendent Almeida gave presentation, basically the same presentation given at a previous work session with the Council, but with more information available pertaining to reopening Oak Haven School. See entire school presentation in Council folder.

Dr. Almeida was questioned about out of town and out of state tuitions, the town's responsibility to pay those tuitions and costs, which are out of the Town's control. Currently the town has out of district tuitions at a live-in facility in New Hampshire along with a few day placements at Harmony Hill. Different levels of support are required by psychologists, social workers and/or multiple teachers in a classroom. If Coventry cannot provide the necessary level of support, then we are obligated to pay the out of district tuition.

There is an additional funding request of \$400,000 from the school department in which case \$300,000 will be applied toward technology and \$100,000 to operate and run Oak Haven next fiscal year. Oak Haven will function as an early learning center for pre-K in 2013, with kindergarten attending also in 2014.

Dr. Almeida discussed the reduction in impact fees to operations, although this upcoming year we will receive some impact fees from the mill projects. He spoke of the current lack of space in the schools, which presents many distractions to students in the classrooms.

President Cote asked how he thought parents will react when they hear the plan to bus their children to Oak Haven? Dr. Almeida responded that parents would rather see Oak Haven reopened as an elementary school, but that would be very costly at approximately \$600,000 and also require redistricting. In 2014 we would move the kindergarten students to Oak Haven, except for the students at Western Coventry School since they have the most available space with the least amount of students attending. We could build in-house classrooms at Western if we have to.

However, if we don't move forward with the early learning center, we would undoubtedly be looking at mobile classrooms at \$100,000 a piece or looking at laptop carts, which are about \$15,000 or \$20,000 each, with a life expectancy of about 3 years.

Discussion ensued with regard to the \$300,000 technology request. Dr. Almeida advised that RIDE put out a bid for one-on-one laptop devices for students, which came back with a price of about \$250.00 per person per year. Programs would be built in, loaded with everything needed including an anti-theft device. The money would also take care of the licensing fees. If there is a problem with a computer, it will be replaced. That is the RIDE package. Another consideration is Google's Chrome Book. Google is really jumping into the education field, offering many web-based opportunities.

Vice-President McGee asked if the \$250.00 per person will be taken from the \$300,000 for technology and also if it will enable the student testing. Dr. Almeida replied that the \$300,000 is for one-on-one devices. The secondary schools are pretty technology savvy, and equipped, so when we transition to one on one devices, we can start to move the desk top devices to the elementary schools. Reallocation is part of the plan.

Councilwoman Carlson asked if once Oak Haven is open and the labs are in, if there is a five year plan? And what would it cost to maintain Oak Haven after opening?

Dr. Almeida replied that there would be an increase in custodial staff, possibly occupational therapy and physical therapy assistants at about \$30,000, so maybe looking at a total of \$70,000. We would reallocate supplies from schools on a per student basis, whereby reducing other budgets to create a budget for Oak Haven. The unique thing about pre K and K is that we don't have to pay for a principal, can just have an administrator and reallocate staff. Additional buses should not be needed as the pre K time is an offset of other times, and we pay per day, not per bus.

No matter what the children's needs are, you have to educate them and if Coventry can't, then we have to pay for their tuition somewhere else. We just had a student move in to town who is going to a full time pre K program at Trudeau Center.

Dr. Almeida explained more about the proposed phase in process with the computers, whereby in 6th grade a child would get the computer; in 9th grade be issued a new one.

Vice-President McGee asked about some of the very high salaries in the school department administration, commenting that it is difficult for taxpayers to justify. One of the biggest complaints he has heard is questioning why we have five principals. However, Dr. Almeida responded that salaries are very comparable with other communities. Dr. Almeida invited any council member to spend the day with him, it would give them knowledge as to why five or six administrators exist; you need to come and see it on a daily basis

When asked about \$100,000 for a legal budget, Ms. Pelletier responded that in comparison, last year over \$200,000 was spent. This does not include settlements, just legal fees.

With regard to the \$156,000 capital request, President Cote stated that the taxpayers have already approved \$8 million for the schools in a bond referendum. Now you want us to go back to the taxpayers and ask for another \$156,000 because \$8 million wasn't enough? Dr. Almeida suggested that they can discuss the \$56,000 requested for security purposes, but there is a \$50,000 price tag on fire codes at Oak Haven that will need to be met.

Slides were shown depicting leaking roofs at the high school, which continue to be patched. Two videos were presented, the first video being implementation of classroom technology and the second video of a Channel 12 newscast with the Commissioner of the RI Dept of Education explaining statewide testing requirements.

Although Vice-President McGee thinks technology is a great idea, the timing can't be worse with everything else going on. Sounds like another unfunded mandate.

However, Dr. Almeida thinks the Education Commissioner would respond by saying that we did get a \$25 million bond from the state to create wireless for the schools. Coventry is going to get over \$720,000 for wireless, but as far as devices, there isn't any funding except for the proposed \$300,000.

Councilman Laboissonniere asked if students will be able to use their own devices and Dr. Almeida responded that devices will need to have the compatibility for Parcc testing. In addition, we need to have licensing in order to download software on all the laptops and it all has to be Parcc compatible, certain applications have to be available when you log on. So, it is not recommended to use your own device.

Work session concluded and President Cote thanked everyone for their time and questions.

Town Clerk