

**Greenfield School Committee**  
**Budget & Finance Sub-Committee**  
**Meeting Minutes**  
**February 3, 2025**

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1. Roll Call/Call to Order:

Present: Kathryn Martini (KM) (Sub-Committee Chair), Melodie Goodwin (MG)  
Also present: Karin Patenaude, Superintendent of Schools (KP), Andy Paquette, Business Manager (AP)

The meeting was called to order at 6:30 p.m.

Member Ann Childs (AC) and Stephen Sullivan, Assistant Superintendent, joined the meeting, via Zoom, at 6:31 p.m.

2. Public Comment: There were no public comments this evening.

3. General discussion with Greenfield City Council representatives on potential budget collaboration between City Council and School Committee.

Councilors invited by KM at behest of School Committee Chair Johnson-Mussad: Michael Terounzo, Greenfield City Council Member/Ways & Means Committee Chair, and John Garrett, Greenfield City Council Vice President. MT was invited to speak first and discussed interest in:

- Learning more about school budget development earlier in the process (in fall)
- Transparency in general
- Possible similar advisory capacity as to capital improvement

KM opened discussion for subcommittee members. MG expressed interest in:

- Transparency in general
- Ability to see receipts
- More detailed budget documents and assistance understanding budget documents

KM noted School Committee members have access to receipts in school warrants biweekly, in addition to monthly budget presentations, and this subcommittee has additional meetings on budget development. KM expressed not all the public have time to watch meetings or view posted materials, so electeds have responsibility to distill information. AC expressed interest in:

- Helping people decipher acronyms, jargon, etc.
- Understanding financial implications if we don't do things (e.g. costs of redistricting vs. drain on enrollment after 4<sup>th</sup> grade)

KM asked for any further general discussion. JG expressed interest in:

- Planning for probable less federal money, including for special education
- Distributing more intelligible, useful information, transparency in general
- Being mindful of wealth gap, communicating why education benefits all

MT added:

- School Committee/City Council are sometimes criticized for things they don't control
- Urged councilors/members, public to inform themselves with readily available information such as meetings and written documentation

KM prompted discussion of role of School Committee in approval of the school budget and role of City Council in relation to the school budget and asked MT to explain. JG concurred the School Committee's role over the school budget is stipulated by the law. MT shared that the City Charter, which he does not like, is written such that:

**Greenfield School Committee**

**Greenfield School Committee  
Budget & Finance Sub-Committee  
Meeting Minutes – February 3, 2025  
Page 2**

- All department budgets except the School Department are separated into 2 branches: salaries/wages and expenses.
- City Council can share views with department heads but can give only bottom line numbers for either branch. Cuts they make may not go as intended. City Council may suggest certain cuts but it is up to the department head.
- The School Department is different; City Council can only give 1 number. Also, it is the only department council can increase budget for, over recommendation of Mayor.
- Acknowledged City Council is not involved in departments but advised department heads to follow council suggestions or else “good luck next year”.

KM provided explanation of School Committee budget process:

- The School Department is overseen by elected committee, unlike other departments.
- The School Committee is responsible for approving the school department budget.
- School Committee reviews the department budget regularly and makes decisions based on its knowledge of the needs of the schools.
- Budget & Finance Subcommittee made efforts this year to improve budget process so that it is (1) more collaborative and (2) directly informed by stakeholders:
  - Held budget listening sessions for the first time
  - Established committee budget priorities for the first time
  - Created budget development calendar for the first time. Shows timeline of actions by the committee, school administration, state legislature, Mayor, and City Council, that result in school budget at beginning of fiscal year. Features FAQ on public input and copy of budget development policy.
  - Policy stipulates the School Committee adopt the budget that would meet the needs of students, which may not always align with pressures for the city.

Question from MG: How do we know the budget represents what our children need?

KM advised members have ample opportunity to ask questions during monthly committee meeting and also this evening and to contact the Superintendent with questions at any time.

Comment/Question from JG: Other departments are smaller, so their budget information is easily comparable. Spreadsheets from school department are hard to understand. Can the school department revise its budget documents?

KM advised that the committee discussed need for more understandable budget documents and the business manager has begun providing narrative report along with spreadsheets for monthly presentations. Discussion has also occurred about improving annual budget presentation.

MG stated she needs more information; she asked the Superintendent for staff lists, asked Pupil Services Director how many paraprofessionals there are, felt discouraged from asking. MG requested number of teachers at different grade levels and salary comparisons, expressed belief there are secrets in the budget. KM responded:

- Expressed understanding for new members learning the distinction between governance (School Committee) and administration (Superintendent).
- Advised it is important to respect roles but can still ask questions.

**Greenfield School Committee**  
**Budget & Finance Sub-Committee**  
**Meeting Minutes – February 3, 2025**  
**Page 3**

- Shared experience of this Superintendent as extremely responsive.
- Encouraged asking questions while being mindful of Superintendent’s time, and also asking the committee Chair to ensure something is within the committee’s scope or requesting to bring something to the committee.
- Shared interest in more comprehensive, digestible materials based on MASC Conference workshop KM attended on developing a meritorious budget.

4. Fiscal Year 2026 Operating Budget
  - A. Superintendent’s Forecast
  - B. Discussion of budget priorities and direction

Superintendent Patenaude presented forecasting of FY26 operating budget:

- Priorities in Superintendent’s Budget for 2025-2026
- Budget highlights for FY26
- Forecasted overall budget increase
- Factors contributing to increase in local appropriation

MG asked:

- Why is it challenging to bring 5<sup>th</sup> grade back to elementary and make GMS 6<sup>th</sup> through 8<sup>th</sup> grade again even though we have fewer overall students?
- Has anything changed based on additional Kindergarten classes this year?

KM responded: enrollment is down but not by so much that the needed space is available. The Superintendent provided detailed information at September 2025 committee meeting regarding how Kindergarten numbers are projected and why this year was an anomaly. Superintendent: In addition to regular classrooms, additional spaces are required for special education, Title I services, math and ELA interventions, and staff break space. Currently there are about 200 students in each elementary, with 2 kindergarten teachers in each building. The district has increased registration activities, including advertising more, holding registration events often and at night, using census information to make parents aware when to enroll.

AC relayed information on enrollment: reduction of about 400 students over the past 20 years.

MG asked:

- What happened to extracurricular stipends that existed years ago?

Superintendent: Efforts underway to revamp because only about 10% of students participating. New clubs added. Budget includes late bus for students who wouldn’t have access without this.

KM asked:

- Please explain increases in out-of-district tuitions

Business manager: The Operational Services Division sets the increase for approved Chapter 766 programs. This year it is 3.67%. The district has no say. The amount projected is based on current enrollments and known new students placed out. MG asked how many students are out-of-district; KM advised a detailed presentation about this was given by Pupil Services Director at the last committee meeting.

- What are the biggest needs we are not able to meet in-district that could be improved in the next 3-5 years with new programming?

**Greenfield School Committee**  
**Budget & Finance Sub-Committee**  
**Meeting Minutes – February 3, 2025**  
**Page 4**

Superintendent answered: Elementary sub-separate behavioral programs. Currently working to implement supports with Registered Behavior Technicians; this also benefits students in general education. We also need to attract more substitute teachers so instructional aides are not being pulled for this. We need to increase supports at GHS for workforce development opportunities.

- How much is needed for instructional materials previously covered by grant?

Superintendent: \$262,000 for Investigating History grades 5-7, Open Sci Ed grade 6 chemistry, Eureka Squared K-4, Illustrative Math grade 5 through Algebra II, CKLA/Amplify grades K-7.

- Will you be able to provide a total cost for redistricting and related factors?

Superintendent: Yes, but there are multiple moving parts (e.g. some positions will be filled internally and some not).

- Will you provide a total for things like step-raises and COLA adjustment?

Superintendent: Yes, the budget presentation will show cost centers with staffing, what that staffing represents, differences in salaries from last year to this year including steps and COLAs.

- Will you detail the cost of restorative justice programming you have discussed? KM noted this is perhaps the top item that constituents have expressed they want to see.

Superintendent: Restorative practice committee formed and the Director of Behavior Services will lead this. Costs will be estimates at this point and determined by where they go for training and which school becomes the pilot. Goal is for pilot to begin fall 2025.

- Many expressed desire for field trips/in-school enrichment, especially for students who don't have such opportunities outside school; is there an increase in this funding?

Superintendent: We level-funded that line but noted there were repetitive events and have worked with principals to alternate experiences aligned with curriculum standards. Also working with community partners to fund specific requests.

- What is entailed in improving Tier II and III interventions?

Superintendent: Currently our progress monitoring offers a composite score rather than the specific information interventionists need, so we are investing in CORE/PASS assessments. Currently evaluating 2 possible literacy intervention resources – UFLI and Lexia.

Question from MG: How many new positions did we add last year?

Question later answered by Business Manager: There were 6- 1 Elementary Instrumental Music teacher, 1 English Language Learner teacher, 1 Assistant Special Education Director, 1 float custodian, 1 IT staff, and 1 human resource School Committee position.

KM invited additional questions. There were none.

KM moved to recommend the Superintendent forward the proposed FY26 operating budget as-is to the full School Committee. On comment from AC, KM revised motion to recommend the Superintendent forward the proposed FY26 operating budget forecast as-is to the full School Committee. Second from AC.

KM opened discussion. KM expressed that this increase is reasonable in light of outside pressures; while not insubstantial, the committee must represent the needs of the students. AC commented that other districts are having similar increases due to economic changes; these are

**Greenfield School Committee  
Budget & Finance Sub-Committee  
Meeting Minutes – February 3, 2025  
Page 5**

unavoidable and the return on investment for public schools is both morally and financially sound. MG said she needed more information.

Questions from KM for Superintendent:

- What has already been done reduce this budget?

Superintendent: Executive leadership team met with every department head and principal, went through each individual line, eliminated redundancies, looked at historical spending by item so as not to project any unnecessary increase, obtained quotes in advance for materials. Initial increase was over 10%, it was brought to 9, then 8, and finally to the current proposal of 7.97%.

- What would be at risk if we were to recommend a smaller increase?

Superintendent: New positions would be first. We would have to look at programming, like BEACON, which is costly but would be detrimental to cut. There may be potential savings or offsets from grants that we will not be able to know, yet.

- Given that we previously had 4 schools in turnaround status and now only 2 of our schools are in turnaround, how will that affect our funding?

Superintendent: Probably we will receive very much less than we've gotten in the past. Title I fund positions. Given potential changes in federal grants, we don't know what may happen.

- Please advise about Governor's budget and Chapter 70 aid.

Business Manager: While the Student Opportunity Act has increased per pupil reimbursement rates in the foundation formula, the increase we are seeing is only about \$126,000. The cherry sheet overall for Greenfield, though, was a surprisingly positive \$780,000.

Follow-up question from MT: Were any of the positions added last year reinstated from the past?

Business Manager: Yes, the float custodian and the Assistant Special Education Director.

Business Manager supplied numbers for out-of-district placements previously requested.

Question from MG: How old are those students (how much longer of that do we have)?

Business Manager supplied age groups. MG commented that a Superintendent she knew once offered to buy a parent a house elsewhere instead of paying their child's out-of-district tuition; KM responded it is sad someone was made to feel unwelcome in their own community. KM noted these costs can fluctuate, as a student may move in and need to attend a specialized school that the district can't replicate the services of. Business Manager clarified that the sending district would pay in year 1 and we would have to budget for the second year, unless they are from out-of-state or DCF placement.

Question from KM: Where are we with Medicaid reimbursement filing?

Business Manager: We continue to work on it, submitted quarterly. Follow-up question from

KM: Has there been discussion with the city about appropriating those funds to the schools?

Business Manager: Yes, but because Greenfield funds schools above the minimum, they could argue the schools get the money anyway and then reduce the amount of the local appropriation

**Greenfield School Committee  
Budget & Finance Sub-Committee  
Meeting Minutes – February 3, 2025  
Page 6**

by the same; has been a perennial discussion going back to Mayor Martin. Comment from MG: It was discussed, but isn't much money. Business Manager clarified it is about \$250,000 a year.

Question from MG: Can you include a level-service budget with raises and COLA (no new positions)?

Business Manager: Yes, but the budget reflects other costs, not just COLA and step-increases, but also a mandated increase in special education tuition rates, changes in transportation, and new positions needed for redistricting. It's very easy to get to the 7.97% increase. This is a needs-based budget. AC: What we are asking for is not much over level-service. KM invited a friendly amendment. MG offered an amendment to recommend the forecasted budget along with a level-service comparison; KM accepted it, and it was accepted by AC as second. KM invited discussion on the amended motion; there was none. The subcommittee voted on motion to request the superintendent forward the proposed FY26 operating budget as forecasted, including a level service comparison, to the full GPS School Committee. The roll call vote was unanimous.

**5. Adjournment**

On a motion by KM, 2<sup>nd</sup> by AC, the meeting adjourned at 9:03 p.m. The roll call vote was unanimous.

Approved: 7/28/25