

WACHUSETT REGIONAL SCHOOL DISTRICT

HOLDEN ♦ PAXTON ♦ PRINCETON ♦ RUTLAND ♦ STERLING

Minutes

**Annual Budget Hearing**

Tuesday, March 25, 2003  
7:00 p.m.

Media Center  
Wachusett Regional High School

*Committee Members Present:*

John Rokicki, Chairman	Jeffrey Gibbs
Duncan Leith, Vice-Chairman	Alice Livdahl
Donald Benson	Kelly Maxwell
Charles Capparelli	Natalie Mello
Clifford Connell	Julie Scott
Carol Esperti (7:50 PM)	Tammy Tod
Kimberly Ferguson	Margaret Watson
Patricia Gates	

*Committee Members Absent:*

David Fedeli	John Nunnari
Jane James	Patricia Young
Peter MacDonald	

*Administration Present:*

Alfred D. Tutela, Ph.D., Superintendent of Schools  
Paul K. Soojian, Director of Operations  
Peter V. Brennan, Comptroller  
Susan H. Sullivan, Executive Assistant to the Superintendent

*Others Present:*

Kelley Nosel, Curriculum Supervisor  
Jason Newton, School Psychologist Liaison  
Linda Lehans, *The Landmark*  
Marc Sanguinetti, *Worcester Telegram & Gazette*  
Susan Staudaher, *Sterling Meetinghouse News*  
Joseph Sullivan, Chair, Holden Selectboard

Joseph Giotta, Chair, Holden Finance Committee  
Alan Berg, Holden Finance Committee  
Edmond Benoit, Holden Finance Committee  
Paul Challenger, Holden Finance Committee  
Marilynn Foley, Holden Finance Committee  
Mary Zona, Holden  
David Gibbs, Sterling  
Maureen Floryan, Holden  
Larry Floryan, Holden  
Mark James, Holden  
John Pacek, Holden  
Michael Sherman, Holden  
Alicia Rokicki, Rutland  
Jim Dunn, Holden

I. Call to Order

Chairman John Rokicki called the Budget Hearing to order at 7:14 PM. The Superintendent distributed the Agenda and the FY04 Appropriation Recommendation (attachments 1 and 2).

II. Presentation of the FY04 Budget Appropriation

The Superintendent reviewed the budget with a PowerPoint presentation (attachment 3).

The Superintendent, through Chairman John Rokicki, entertained questions from the School Committee regarding the budget.

Following inquiry, the Superintendent reported that he was not ready to discuss what cuts would be made if necessary but would need to know the School Committee's bottom line number. The Superintendent reminded the Committee that the direction given by the Committee was to present a level staff budget increasing only *Salaries, Benefits & Insurance*, and *Special Education – Tuition Other Schools*.

The Superintendent reported that District staff is meeting with insurance consultants to try to lower the premiums. The School Committee must vote a budget number and then the Superintendent will develop a budget accordingly.

The Superintendent corrected what was published in the March 24, 2003 *Worcester Telegram & Gazette* that the School Committee has not voted

on an Early Retirement Program, although the result of one could be as much as one million dollars.

Following a suggestion to use \$800,00 from Excess & Deficiency, the Superintendent reported that he could not recommend that at this time because there would be no cushion for unknown things, which come up through the year. The Superintendent is also concerned about the special education tuition costs for FY03 and will have a better idea on the final costs for special education by April.

In response to an inquiry regarding the final date for the budget, the Superintendent must prepare non-renewal letters for non-professional status teachers by June 15<sup>th</sup> and, therefore, must know the budget. Once the letters are sent out, those teachers would be eligible to collect unemployment for the summer at the District's expense. Towns can and should delay annual town meetings.

Following an inquiry regarding the use of sabbatical leave as a cost saving measure, the Superintendent reported that sabbatical leave is a negotiated item and that once all costs are determined, there would be no savings.

Motion: That \$800,000 from *Excess & Deficiency* be used for the FY04 budget

(C. Esperti)  
(D. Benson)

At the recommendation of the Superintendent, a friendly amendment was made by Member Carol Esperti and accepted by Member Donald Benson to change the motion to "That 90% of the available *Excess & Deficiency* in May would be applied to the FY04 budget."

Vote on Motion: That 90% of the available *Excess & Deficiency* in May would be applied to the FY04 budget.

In favor:

John Rokicki  
Duncan Leith  
Donald Benson  
Charles Capparelli  
Clifford Connell  
Carol Esperti  
Kimberly Ferguson

Jeffrey Gibbs  
Alice Livdahl  
Kelly Maxwell  
Natalie Mello  
Julie Scott  
Tammy Tod

Opposed:

Patricia Gates  
Margaret Watson

(Motion passed 13-2)

Following an inquiry, the Superintendent reported that in the past the District and the Member Towns used the preliminary numbers from the State, which were released in February. In FY03 this process fell apart as only “soft” numbers were released and final numbers were not available until much later. The Superintendent explained the legislative process and believes that, although the final budget will not be the same as the Governor’s proposed House 1 Budget, the revenue will be reduced to the District and to the Member Towns.

The Superintendent reminded the Committee that the townspeople are the final decision makers by voting to approve the budget at town meetings.

### III. Public Hearing

Joseph Sullivan, Chair, Holden Selectboard, asked the Committee to ponder the timing of the budget. Concerns were expressed about what will happen if the process is stalled at the legislative level.

Mark James, Holden, read a prepared statement (attachment 4).

Edmond Benoit, Holden Finance Committee, reminded Committee members that they were elected from a particular town and have an obligation to be aware of the municipal budgets as well as the District budget. He urged municipal and school officials to meet and discuss the budget.

Joseph Giotta, Chair, Holden Finance Committee, urged the Committee to talk with municipal officials because the funding comes from the same source, the taxpayers.

Chairman John Rokicki closed the Public Hearing.

IV. Adjournment

Motion: To adjourn

(N. Mello)  
(D. Leith)

Vote:

In favor:

John Rokicki  
Duncan Leith  
Donald Benson  
Charles Capparelli  
Clifford Connell  
Carol Esperti  
Kimberly Ferguson  
Patricia Gates  
Jeffrey Gibbs  
Alice Livdahl  
Kelly Maxwell  
Natalie Mello  
Julie Scott  
Tammy Tod  
Margaret Watson

Opposed:

(Motion passed unanimously)

The Budget Hearing was adjourned at 8:31 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Alfred D. Tutela, Ph.D.  
Superintendent of Schools