MASCONOMET REGIONAL DISTRICT SCHOOL COMMITTEE

March 15, 2023

MEMBERS PRESENT:	T. Cooper, Chair, Middleton	M. Ogden, Vice Chair, Topsfield
	P. Bernheart, Boxford	T. Currier, Middleton
	W. Hodges, Topsfield	Z. Bhuju, Topsfield
	K. Prentakis, Middleton	C. Bolzan, Boxford
	C. Miller, Boxford	J. McLean, Boxford
	D. Casamassima, Middleton	

MEMBERS ABSENT
OTHERS PRESENT: M. Harvey, Superintendent
J. Sands, Assistant Superintendent & Chief Procurement Officer
L. Bennett, Assistant Superintendent for Student Services

A. **Call to Order** – T. Cooper, Chair, called the Regular Meeting of the School Committee of March 15, 2023, to Order at 7:00 p.m., in the High School Library.

B. **Remarks from the Chair** – T. Cooper reviewed Masco Vision 2025 and its intent. The strategic plan is being worked on to reach Vision 2025 goals. T. Cooper read Vision 2025.

C. **Comments from the Public** – Kendra Petrone, Middleton – asked that ESSER III funds be used towards mental health for students.
Volleyball captains, Kierra Gallagher, Gabby Sieda and Olivia Richards asked that the JV2 Volleyball team and coach be funded. It would benefit the program and allow more students to experience being a member of a team. Masco is the only school in the NEC conference without a JV2 team.
Kathleena Scarpatto, Topsfield – asked if administrative cuts and costs had been reviewed before teachers being cut.

D. **Turf Up Report** – Sarah Guido, Topsfield reviewed why turf fields are needed, including unsafe playing conditions, games having to be cancelled or moved. Turf fields will improve the ability to host tournament games and recreational programs for our communities. The need for fields has grown over the past few years. The grass fields are difficult to maintain, especially during drought conditions and the stress on the water supply. Sara reviewed the timeline from December 14, 2022 when the approval for fundraising was given. She also reviewed taxpayer support minus private fundraising. Phase 1 to relocate the football field and new multipurpose field on the Southern end of the Masco campus is the focus of the private fundraising. Design, Phase 1 construction and permitting and contingency costs were reviewed. To date, they have verbal commitments for $500,000 based on permits being issued. Accounts and funds to receive donations was discussed. The hope is to expand the fundraising committee to include representatives from the 3 communities, all field related booster groups and Tri-Town recreational sports organizations. A marketing plan will be developed, and different donor levels will be determined. A Donor Wall with levels and categories and the number of donors per

category will be decided and the goal reviewed. Potential naming rights and locations were reviewed with the goal of raising $4 million dollars with naming rights.
Christina discussed sponsorships which will need clear guidelines. Research into the donors will be necessary to make sure they represent what Masco is about and that sponsorships are equitable.
Discussion followed regarding reducing the amount asked for in the Warrant Article on Town Meeting floor based on fundraising at that time. J. Sands reviewed the process as well as an account which could be set up for turf donations. Discussion followed with regard to meeting with the towns and educating the residents. C. Miller added that it would be helpful to have members of the communities on the Turf Up Committee to speak on the floor of Town Meetings about the Warrant Article. Discussion of the Regional Agreement does not speak to this directly and how Turf Up is part of the budget process.
Amending the Warrant Article was discussed and adding a condition of all 3 towns approval. This School Committee cannot make a promise that the future School Committee would need to follow through with due to upcoming elections.

E. **FY24 Budget Adoption** – M. Harvey reviewed the level service budget recommended with the increase in Operating Expenses in the amount of $2,415,229 (6.4%) and an increase of Operating Assessment in the amount of $1,783,285 (5.9%) over FY23. On March 1, 2023, the recommendation was updated with the Cherry Sheet amounts. He reviewed the assessment per Town. On March 8th the SC requested 3 additional versions of the budget which were presented. J. Sands reviewed each version presented with the cuts proposed, shifting of operating expenses to ESSER III funds, an increase in the Circuit Breaker offset and additions of JV2 Volleyball and JV Golf.
P. Bernheart clarified that there are 4 options to vote on tonight.
K. Prentakis reviewed discussions from previous meetings regarding the reductions requested. He also stated that given the projected enrollment for next year, there is no way to know the impact on the class sizes. He suggested that once the state money is finalized and class sign-ups are completed the SC could review and rehire 2 FTEs. He supports Version #3.
C. Bolzan added that 4 retirements do not mean 4 open positions or the first positions to be cut. Our student/teacher ratio is worse than the state average and our expenditure per student is higher than most due to teacher salaries. Eliminating FTEs makes the ratio worse and impacts the students, staff and faculty.
T. Cooper stated that the strategic plan may look differently at how leadership works in the future, and the current administration positions are very lean and we should not cut the leaders who lead the teachers. The students need to feel connected to their teachers and feel safe. Supports Version #1.
J. McLean asked why the 4 retirees would not be replaced. This will be determined by class sign-ups and then the class schedule will be built. J. Sands added that replacing them with less compensated teachers is already built into the recommended budget and reviewed that information.
T. Currier stated that he was leaning towards Version #3. He expressed his concern with what amount is fair to the taxpayers.
P. Bernheart believes future expenses need to be looked at to project the impact on the students. Mental health issues are increasing which can result in more out of district

placements and the costs. There should be no staff cuts since there are years of implications to address.

T. Cooper agreed and added that the mental health of staff and teachers have not been addressed. Cutting FTEs will impact staff and teachers greatly.

C. Bolzan asked for an update on the Golf program. The AD provided information that 2 teams that consistently had more student's tryout than spots available were Volleyball and Golf, resulting in cuts. There has been a consistent demand in both sports for an additional team.

W. Hodges added that it is important that students have the opportunity to be part of a team and he supports both positions. We are still recovering from the impact of the pandemic and not reducing educators is important.

M. Ogden stated that the students and schools have suffered in the past 3 years and as a community we need to provide an adequate education. The recommended budget is level service and the SC has done what we said we would do. Some costs are out of our control. We have spoken with legislators and voiced our concerns. Supports Version #1.

T. Currier asked if the 10 paraprofessional open spots are considered in the budget. J. Sands stated that they are in the budget as if the spots were filled because they are needed.

T. Cooper stated that we are not enhancing student programs with this budget, only covering existing costs with the increase.

D. Casamassima stated that it is hard to fully accept Version #3 knowing where the cuts come from. Level service budget is where we should be.

Z. Bhuju asked for a review of the shifting of ESSER III funds. J. Sands reviewed the shift of ESSER III funds to pay for one-time or multi-year operational expenses.

J. McLean added that cutting FTEs is looking to cut in areas that have increased the least in the budget. 85% of the budget increase is out of the SC control. Cutting FTEs is wrong at this point. Supports Version #1.

Z. Bhuju added that school is people, not a place. The Administration has daily interactions with staff and students and have a huge impact on students. Most of the increases are out of our control, but we can control the impact to the district and to our students. Supports Version #1.

Z. Bhuju made a motion that the Masconomet School Committee approve the FY24 Total General Fund Expenditures Budget of $40,206,736. This amount includes General Fund Operating Expenses in the amount of $39,757,686 and General Fund Capital Costs including Debt Service Expense in the amount of $449,050; it was seconded by M. Ogden and approved by a vote of 9-2.

MOTION: Approve FY24 Total General Fund Expenditures Budget
VOTE: 9-2, Motion Passed.

Z. Bhuju made a motion that the Masconomet School Committee votes to assess the Towns of Boxford, Middleton and Topsfield a combined total of $32,386,265 as the amount necessary to operate and maintain the District, inclusive of capital costs and debt service expense for FY24. The District's Assistant Superintendent has determined the amounts apportioned to each Town, and presented them herein on the slide entitled, "Assessments by Town". The District's Treasurer shall certify and

transmit the budget and assessments to each member within 30 days of School Committee approval; it was seconded by M. Ogden and approved by a vote of 9-2.

MOTION: Approve FY24 Budget Assessment
VOTE: 9-2, Motion Passed

C. Bolzan discussed grants available and who can we engage to assist with applying for grants.

F. **Subcommittee Reports**

Community Relations – meeting held prior to the SC meeting tonight. The next meeting TBD. Can assist with getting the word out on the budget.

Anti-Racism – will be scheduling the next meeting next week. Continuing to work with Tri-Town Council and Faith leaders in the 3 Towns.

Policy – next meeting is scheduled for March 24th at 2:30pm and will post the Agenda.

Liaison Updates – Z. Bhuju attended the SEPAC meeting with the legislative representatives discussing the bills in the legislature. Their next event is April 11th. Mental Health Training is being offered April 4th and 5th with the Tri-Town Council.

C. Miller attended the SB meeting Monday where M. Harvey presented the budget. The SB would like to hear from Turf Up directly and would like to be engaged on the Capital Plan with meetings. M. Ogden added that a listening session is scheduled for Saturday at the Topsfield Library.

G. **Consent Agenda**

a. Approval of March 1st and March 6th Meeting Minutes.
b. Accept MEF Grants.

C. Miller asked that the March 6th Minutes be pulled from the Consent Agenda and will email edits.

A motion was made to approve the Consent Agenda as presented by Z. Bhuju, seconded by T. Currier and unanimously approved.

MOTION: Approve the Consent Agenda
VOTE: 11-0, Motion Carried

The Meeting was adjourned by Chair T. Cooper at 9:30pm.

Submitted By: ______________________________ Approved: ______________
Lynn Viselli, Recording Secretary Date

Per the Massachusetts Open Meeting Law, the list of documents that were either distributed to the Masconomet School Committee before the meeting in the packet or at the meeting.

1. Agenda
2. Turf Presentation
3. FY24 Budget Versions 1, 2, 3
4. Consent Agenda