Finance Committee – Advance Questions for 3/17/26 Meeting

Upper Cape

- The assessment this year is now a 6.39% increase over last year. This is a significant increase compared to both the town's and town's school budget projections – be sure to take us through where the increases are predominantly coming from, the driver behind them, and the discussions that went on with your School Committee around this level of increased spending

- Take us through the application and acceptance process in light of continued growth in enrollment, which then impacts our assessment. Is there governance around the number of students that can go to Upper Cape from each town?

CPA/Planning

- In May of 2024, the town meeting approved the release of an updated Local Comprehensive Plan (LCP). At a future finance committee meeting, I would like the town to share, given that this is the second year since the update, how is the LCP influencing or affecting the budget?

- Inquiring about the town's affordable housing stock and all ongoing affordable housing initiatives.

- To the answer provided to how often, if at all, we have utilized CPA funds for school maintenance or capital improvements, please share the info with all members.

Budget Follow-up Questions - Town

- Current year status of Police overtime.

- It was stated that ~80% of the cost to operate the transfer station is recovered from the sticker fees and the bag fees. Why 80%? Why not 85 or 90%?

- How can we keep an outlook of impact to the town's budget and taxpayers going of the "what's next" costs side-by-side with the increasing cost challenges we've discussed over the last several weeks? Could we work on coming up with a way to project what budgets will look like over the next 5 – 10 years?

- Is the senior real estate tax discount for volunteering utilized enough, is there room for more volunteers and more publicity about the program?

- Incremental cost of the shellfishing program and the value of the license fees collected. Said check in with DNR on this would be needed.

- Bringing forth a "Seasonal Communities" designation at Town Meeting was turned down by the Board of Selectmen. Falmouth is moving ahead with a Town Meeting vote on an understanding that it should be decided by the legislative body. Bud suggested to Selectmen that we should wait until we see how other towns fair from this. What do we know from town already in it, such as ?

  Related to this is the earlier discussion about affordable housing, since the Seasonal Communities designation can create housing specifically for municipal employees.

- How do we follow through on suggestions about determining truer, non-Cape, comparisons of the town and schools budgets and metrics?

  With respect to school performance, enrollment, and budgets, the Department of Elementary & Secondary Education has created an online tool know as DART (District Analysis and Review Tool) that measures a given district against ten districts of comparable size and demographics. Here is the profile of Sandwich and its ten DART districts.

Budget Follow-up Questions - Schools

- Breakout of positions funded by grants that receive and/or are eligible for benefits and retirement.

All of the grant funded positions are listed in our FY27 budget document. Please see page 7. A total of 9.0 FTEs that are funded by the Special Education/240 grant are eligible for benefits. The 8.0 FTE ESP positions funded by the Title I Grant are also eligible for benefits. I will check our employee rosters to ascertain how many of the above FTEs take benefits.

- PreK and early learning offerings - Please provide information on the preK and early learning opportunities offered at the Forestdale school. On average how many students participate, how many classrooms are utilized by the program, what is the cost of the program and not including property tax dollars what funding is available from grants, donations and tuitions & fees.
  Currently there are 75 students (3, 4, and 5 year olds) in the School for Early Learning (SEL) in five classrooms at Forestdale. This program is completely self-funded based upon tuitions that families pay. (Please see (SEL Revolving Account on p.6). The SEL is completely housed in the portable classrooms attached to Forestdale. The integrated pre-school at Forestdale (also 3, 4, and 5 year olds) serves 82 students in 2 full days classrooms and 2 ½ half-day classrooms (which have both AM and PM sessions). The integrated preschool is partially funded by tuitions that families of peer students pay ($268K for FY26- also on p.6). It is also supplemented by a modest Early Childhood federal grant ($10K). The rest of the program expenses are found in the SPS Operational Budget.

- With the growing health care costs what are the strategies being considered as you move into employee contract discussions, e.g. employee contributions?
  This (a proposal with respect to health care insurance) is something that needs to be coordinated with the town. As we will enter negotiations for a successor three-year with four collective bargaining units next spring, we will do extensive benchmarking to ensure that we are regionally competitive (just as we did in 2024).
- Considering ongoing growth of the Tuition Assessment, Upper Cape's Assessment, and SPED line items in the budget – together $11mil in FY'27 budget - how is the School Administration & School Committee thinking about these?
  The key issue is to create opportunities for students to keep as many students in district as possible. In creating the Innovation Career Pathways Program at SMHS, that is a positive step in the right direction, particularly in looking at the career exploration component that UCT offers. We are also planning on

improving our 12+ (postgraduate) program for those students with the most significant needs. The redesign will strengthen the vocational component, getting these students out into the community to a greater degree. As we must provide an education for these students until they turn 22 years, the vocational component is frequently a factor why some parents push for an out-of-district placement. While this work is ongoing, the core of our work is fostering a culture of belonging across all schools and grade levels. That is a major piece of our new strategic plan.

- Would like an understanding how school-related capital spending projects (including this request) are being ranked and prioritized, as well as who is responsible for creating the ranked order.
  The key point person in prioritizing requests is the Director of Facilities, Michael Ryan. They are discussed with me and Director of Finance & Operations Michelle Austin during our weekly meetings before being submitted to the School Committee for oversight and approval.

- Now that the Facilities Condition Assessment Report has been finalized – what are the next steps. What are the plans for kicking off an initiative sooner than later to pull this together more formally and working collaboratively with the town?
  The game plan is to call together a working committee of members of the School Committee, Select Board, Finance Committee along with both town and school administration. The intent is to go through the FCA carefully, prioritizing the most critical needs. There will also be discussions around strategy for funding.

  Provide us with the summary presentation/slides on this topic made at the last school committee meeting.
  They may be found at this link.

- Are the exit survey results available regarding students choosing to go elsewhere?
  A survey was shared with 8th grade parents in the spring of 2024. It asked a series of open ended questions regarding what aspects of programming would keep their students at SMHS and what would cause them to explore other options. Here is the summary of that survey's results. Unfortunately, there was

not a great response rate to the survey, despite repeated calls for participation. We will administer a common survey to middle school parents this spring.

Budget Follow-up Questions - Capital

Provide an explanation on how the capital budgets come together in municipalities vs. general business; i.e. annual repair & maintenance being capitalized versus handled as an expense.