



Howard County Council

George Howard Building
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Ellicott City, Maryland 21043-4392

COUNCILMEMBERS

Courtney Watson, Chairperson
District 1
Mary Kay Sigaty, Vice Chairperson
District 4
Calvin Ball
District 2
Greg Fox
District 5
Jennifer Terrasa
District 3

Minutes (approved) Budget Work Session May 09, 2008

Chairperson Courtney Watson called the meeting to order at 9:01 a.m. on May 9, 2008, in the Ellicott Room, George Howard Building.

Members Present: Calvin Ball, Greg Fox, Mary Kay Sigaty, Courtney Watson; Jennifer Terrasa arrived at 9:04 a.m.

The Council reviewed the operating budgets of the Board of Education, as follows.

Ms. Watson and Ray Wacks, Budget Director, discussed briefly the \$20,000 estimated overtime costs that the County will need to provide to the Board of Education for filming the meetings of the Council for television. Mr. Wacks expressed the opinion that the Board would cover this expense. He also said that the Howard Community College (HCC) needs the full \$120,000 budgeted, although the service they provide to the Council will be limited. Bob Glascock discussed the Board's plan for enhancing television services.

The Council proceeded by discussing items on the "cut" list previously provided by the Superintendent, Sydney Cousin. These are items that were requested by the Board by which would be reduced, given the actual allowance by the County Executive:

- Leadership interns – reduced request of 15 to 5 at \$45,000 each. These are teachers used in administrative trainee positions.
- Ms. Watson asked for the total money spent in the cultural proficiency initiative.
- Mr. Glascock explained the plagiarism program, which is part of the writing program.
- There followed a discussion of the new technology initiative resulting from State Board of Education initiatives.

- In the foreign language area, there is no expansion at the middle school; Chinese and Arabic are added at the high school level in cooperation with HCC.
- There was a discussion of the fund sources for English as a Second Language.
- The leadership interns were described as having higher priority than the new technical education teachers.

There were questions about enrollment trends (kindergarten is stabilizing) and financial literacy (it is handled throughout the curriculum.) There was a discussion of the effect of the turn-over of homes in older neighborhoods, resulting in higher numbers of school-aged children.

There followed a discussion of the formula for allocating positions, which is designed to reduce class size. The target is one teacher per 27.5 students (high school).

Ms. Sigaty asked about the replacement of theater equipment damaged in community use. Mr. Brown noted that State law limits the kinds of charges the schools may make for community use.

There was a discussion of the target replacement cycle for textbooks (8 years).

Ms. Watson asked for a history of the gate receipts for interscholastic athletics.

There was a discussion of special education services. The population was said to be relatively stable, both at the Cedar Lane School and at the regular school level.

Calvin Ball asked about the increase in cluster nurses for schools and asked how Howard County's nurse coverage compares to other counties.

There was a discussion of pupil transportation, including the proposed cut in substitute drivers. While studies have shown contracting services to be more economical for the County, there are coverage problems. The proposed addition of County substitutes was a way to test the effectiveness of moving from contract to county-operated service. There followed a discussion of routing and other practical problems in transportation services.

There was a discussion of the maintenance budget. Ms. Watson noted that the board added to this category.

There was a discussion of health insurance and retirement costs. Dave White explained the Board's self-insurance program and the relationship to the County's health program. Ray Brown and Mr. White said that the budget includes retirement costs only for non-State-covered employees. Most employees' retirement is funded fully by the State, but this may become an issue in future State budgets.

There followed a discussion of the capital budget:

- State funding in Bushy Park is a payback for local funding.
- Marriott's Ridge has some surplus funds that will be transferred.
- Systemic renovation: The allowance is substantially below the Board's request. Ms. Watson asked for a breakdown by schools and projects.
- Ms. Watson asked for the total dollars spent to implement full-day kindergarten, a State mandate.

- Funds for relocatable classrooms would allow them to be moved.
- Site acquisition – the request was for \$4. Million; the allowance is zero. Ken Roey indicated that the Board is seeking land in the Route 1 corridor area. Ms. Watson asked if they have considered accommodating Route 1 growth at Howard and Long Reach high schools and building a new school in Ellicott City. Dr. Cousin replied that they need about 50 acres for a high school, an amount not readily available in a buildable lot. Ms. Sigaty asked about the possibility of using a more urban design requiring less land.
- Parking lot expansion: Mr. Fox noted the problem with student parking in adjacent neighborhoods.
- E1014 – Triadelphia Sequencing Batch Reactor (SBR): This project responds to new State standards for nitrogen limits.
- Mt. Hebron High School: After considerable discussion, the Council took a non-binding straw vote (sense of the council) on a motion to move the funds from the contingency reserve to this project. All members except Ms. Terrasa voted “yes”. The Board assured the Council that the planning of the project will involve the community and the staff further.

Following this discussion, the Council discussed the possible impact that freeing up \$3 million by cutting the planned expenditures for recycling bins could have on the school budget. Mr. Fox noted that 75% of the school system’s priorities could be restored if the recycling bin purchase were cut from the budget. Mr. Ball asked the Board if they have considered where they might cut \$5 million from the budget, if the fee increases were not passed and the revenue to allow spending for the fee-based purchases were raised through cuts in the school system budget.

- Dr. Cousin noted that there is a \$1.7 million shortage in the capital budget because state funding was lower than expected. He said, however, that restoring funds to the operating budget has greater importance than restoring the capital budget.

Ms. Watson announced that there would be no need for an additional work session.

The Council adjourned until 1:12 p.m., when they resumed with consideration of the Howard Community College budget. In addition to all Council members, President Kate Hetherington, and Lynn Coleman, Vice President of Administration, were present for the discussion.

Ms. Watson began by noting that growth (in enrollment) is a major issue.

There followed a discussion of the foundation, the sources and dedication of its funds, and its status.

There was a discussion of health benefits and the differences in County and College assumptions underlying the budget for these costs.

Dr. Hetherington discussed the proposal to raise tuition by \$2 per credit hour.

Ms. Watson asked about the services that would be provided for the \$120,000 grant proposed from the County for government television service. The funds, according to Lynn Coleman, would be for two positions. Dr. Hetherington said that the college would need these two positions whether or not they provide services to the Council. It is the college’s expectation that they will produce the Council’s programs, even if they don’t film them.

Ms. Watson asked Council Administrator Sheila Tolliver to arrange a meeting with Ron Robeson of the HCC, Sydney Cousin of the Board of Education, to discuss the mechanics of the televising of Council meetings.

Turning to the capital budget, there was a discussion of the parking shortage and the need for structured parking.

There followed a discussion of Belmont, including the increases in costs (attributed to geothermal construction, an expansion of the barn, and addition of space for the culinary program). Lynn Coleman said that the College intends to complete the transfer of Belmont from the Foundation to the College in the fall.

The members then discussed with college representatives the profits and loss, noting that there is a loss projected of \$566,000 for FY 09. Ms. Coleman noted that this loss should be negated when the debt is paid on the transfer of the facility. The Center is expected to be self-supporting for operations. Legal fees and the loss of two staff people contributed to losses in FY 08.

Ms. Coleman, responding to a question from Mr. Fox, updated the Council on the status of spending for the project.

The Council adjourned and reconvened at 4:01 p.m. to discuss the budget of the public libraries. Valerie Gross, Director of Libraries, joined the discussion.

The principal change in the libraries' budget is the implementation of a salary plan, which Ms. Gross described.

There was a discussion of the Miller Library expansion. The cut, approved by the Library Board, required reduction in the size of the lobby and the 200 seat auditorium. The Board agreed to this, based on the possibility of a new central library in downtown Columbia. They will need to reconsider the library long-term plan to allow for this new facility. Ms. Gross emphasized that the new Miller branch will still be quite large, considerably larger than other libraries in the county. The libraries will work with the community on the design.

The meeting was adjourned at 4:28 p.m.