

**Minutes**  
**Watertown Board of Education**  
**Budget & Finance Subcommittee Meeting**  
**Monday, December 17, 2014 – 6:00 p.m.**  
**John Trumbull Primary School**  
**Special Ed. Conference Room-E206**

**Members Present:** Leslie Crotty, Chairman Budget & Finance Committee  
Tom Lambert, Committee Member  
Janelle Wilk, Committee Member

**Members Absent:** None

**Others Present:** Dr. Bridget Carnemolla, Superintendent of Schools  
Jill Browne, Business Manager  
Donnah Rochester, Director of Student Services  
Janet Parlato, Director of Curriculum  
Vic Vincenzi, Member, Board of Education  
Josephine Cavallo – Rosa, Member, Board of Education  
Don Orsini, Member, Board of Education

**1. Convene Meeting**

Ms. Crotty, Chairman of the Committee, convened the meeting and immediately turned the meeting over to Dr. Carnemolla.

**2. Budget Discussion and Objectives for Fiscal Year 2015 - 2016**

Dr. Carnemolla began by thanking everyone for coming and explained that she wanted to start the budget process earlier this year. She explained that this is the very beginning of the process and that she can't even begin to finish completing the budget until the end of December/beginning of January when she receives year-end numbers. The budget process was approached in a different way by beginning from scratch. She did not want to roll over the budget. This budget process for her started when she began her new job in July. When she had to cut the budget as she came on board, it started her thinking about the process for this year and where she could cut from the beginning.

The process began in the summer with the administrators and preliminary needs were turned into the office by the end of October. Dr. Carnemolla feels that she can justify every line that is in this budget because of the priorities. This is more of a financial plan versus the budget as she

looks for it as our resources supporting our goals. It is not at just about adding to the budget but going line by line for looking to where she can make it more efficient. She went back over the vision and the goals set as a district. Knowing those she asked herself how I develop a budget that will fund these goals.

She began by looking at the district performance. She went over the rankings in Watertown again and showed that across the board we ranked in the bottom three of our DRG. We do a lot of things right in our district but we have to ask ourselves what are we not doing right? She went over all grades at what percentages they are in math in the elementary level, the middle school level, and the high school level. At no point did we rank above 20. Only 44% of our grade 10 students are at goal for math. She also went over science scores for grades five, eight, and 10. I had to then asked myself, do we even get it right from the beginning? For instance, looking at class sizes, the average class size at John Trumbull for last year in kindergarten is between 21 and 22 students. That may not seem a lot to you but we are at the bottom of our DRG for class size, and as she visits these classrooms, she can assure you that is a lot of students for a kindergarten class. Grade 3, for instance for next year, is expected to be even higher than the average class sizes for grade 2.

She then began discussing what she would like in the budget, not calling them add-ons, but looking where to save money to get these items into the budget. She began discussing the district social worker, which has been discussed in the past, but is even more needed now. We could use at least three, but since it is a long-term plan, we shall begin with one. The need is great with over 300 students needing help just between the dates of September 1 and December 1, 2014. Dr. Carnemolla then explained and broke down those 300 students and how they needed help. And these are only the documented numbers. We do have a grant through the company called Wellmore that does help some of our students, but there are so many more who need it. They needed not just at home but at school as their issues do affect their school work on a daily basis. There were over 180 calls made to the social services department that are only documented within our schools. This does not even cover the calls made from outside of the schools, and which there are many. In our schools right now, 24% are at or below the poverty level. That is one in four of our kids living at or below the poverty level.

The numbers continue to go up at Judson. We were able to move a teacher from Swift two Judson last year however, they continue to rise. Looking at the numbers from the share second grade and seeing who will be going to Polk and who will be going to Judson, the numbers require another third grade teacher at Judson. We have many more people moving in to our districts than our leaving them. There are classrooms at Judson in third grade that have 25 students. If a third grade teacher is not hired, each classroom would have a minimum of 24 students. She then moved on to the math curriculum specialist. This person will model lessons aligned with the common core state standards and ensure effective and coordinated practice from grades K – 6. Our math achievement data over the past seven years demonstrates the need for this position. In the past reviews consultants for this, and this is a way to save money going forward.

She moved on to the science teacher needed at Watertown high school. Class sizes exceed the optimal number of students for any laboratory experience. Science certifications are very specific. They cannot be used on different levels of science, for instance, a physics certification can only be used for physics. They are very limited to what they can teach. The labs are built to be used safely for around 20 kids. Some of the science classes currently have between 25 and 26 kids. That is an issue when it comes to using a lab safely. It is sad to think that after their wonderful renovation we did, we are not using these labs to their fullest capability.

She then discussed tutors and told everyone this was a compromise for her. We're trying to give children as much support as possible and we need the tutors to break the kids into smaller groups. We can't afford for teachers. These people will be certified and may just be a college for example. This particular position will most likely be for Judson as we have a grant that covers the students at Polk because of the amount of students that receive free/reduced lunch.

She then moved on to position called director of technology. We need a person that will manage all of the aspects of this position. Dr. Carnemolla is currently managing this herself, and self admittedly, doing a poor job with so many other things to do. It is 2014, and we cannot do without someone who oversees our technology. They need to help manage the three people we have, the student information system and websites, recommend the appropriate hardware and software solutions develop programs, and make sure we are effectively utilizing our educational technology. We are at least five steps behind where we should be right now. There is no one person who oversees our entire district data. Because of that when we are looking for "clean" data, it takes much longer than it should and many more people than it should to gather it. This person does not only need a college degree and informational technology, but the ability to manage people as well. Moving on to technology needs, last year we cut the budget for the new computers that were needed desperately. 46% of the district's computers of our computers are over six years old. This means 46% of our computers cannot handle what we need them to do on a daily basis. At Munson house, the computers are over eight years old. They freeze, they go off-line, they go black, all because they have old operating systems I can't handle what we need them to do. We can't get support for the operating systems we have. It's 2014, the teachers need the technology to teach and the kids need the technology to learn. In reality I need to replace all 46% or 512 of these computers but to be reasonable, and for what we can afford, we settled on 240. She discussed Brady's computers would then go and why. We are looking to lease them to allow us to spread the costs over multiple years. We will own them at the end of the three years and it allows us to spread the payment over those three years. Mr. Orsini suggested that instead of owning them after those three years, we give them back and continually get newer computers and leave this as a line item in the budget. Dr. Carnemolla then noted while that is a great idea, what happens to the other 300 that need to be replaced? Mr. Vincenzi then suggested we do them all at one time. If we don't the software won't work in three years anyway. Make it a line item cost and that way computers will be updated every three years. There was mutual agreement across all that were there and agreed upon that they will look at the cost of forming the budget.

At the last facilities meeting, you saw everything that all the schools had on their “wish list”. Over the last month she went over all of those lists and even went to some of the schools to look at what they needed. We can’t possibly do all of it, and frankly not all of it was needed. But, if you look at what we spent on facilities maintenance in the last three years he would be astounded. In 2012-2013, we spent zero dollars. In 2013-2014 we only spent \$21, 447, \$10,000 of which was used for a camera upgrade and were paid back for, so only \$10,000 was spent in the entire district. And then in 2014-2015 we are budgeted for \$65,855 but that is a frozen line item currently. At this point, we need to spend some money in this district. We need a long-term plan. Nothing is written in stone, but the slide will show you everything that is truly needed. Dr. Carnemolla then went over each line in the side as to what it was and why we need it. A lot of questions were asked by the members about each line item and all were discussed and agreed upon at this time.

The next area brought up in the budget discussion was the fact that this is the year the contractual obligation for certified staff goes up 2.25%. Dr. Carnemolla noted again, this is why she went line by line the budget. This is why she sat with every administrator and asked what they were spending and why. Yes, she would like all of the computers replaced, but it’s important heard this budget passes the first time. She feels that she drove the administrators crazy going line by line and asking so many questions. Things were cut, things were agreed upon, and essentially the budget was done and redone over three times already. We are taking into consideration some early retirement and she has asked for numbers regarding this. She is not saying yes or no at this point, but to see where the money would be saved. She does not want to drain the district of experience because we have so many excellent teachers.

Mr. Lambert asked where we were in the district regarding enrollment. Dr. Carnemolla stated that the consultant that was hired was pretty much on target with the numbers that he has given us. At John Trumbull the numbers have pretty much been on target. But at the other schools, like Judson, the numbers are off and are going up. Our housing market seems to be doing well and we seem to be having more people moving in to our district than leaving it. Ms. Crotty asked about title one funding and Ms. Parlato let her know that Swift is a title I school. The only title I school we don’t have is Judson. Mr. Lambert then asked if there’s been any savings with residency issues and the answer is that it has gone down significantly in the last year and there are more active investigations but again, much less the last year.

Mr. Lambert then asked about textbooks. Dr. Carnemolla said that the grim truth is that textbooks continually get caught. There is an entire class, at the high school, but has no books at all. Those books are about \$25,000. At this point, no matter what she has to do, she will get those books. Mr. Lambert feels as these become a huge priority. Ms. Crotty asked the board’s thoughts on using information, for instance, the numbers about social services needs (2-1-1 calls) with the public. Mr. Vincenzi feels anything we can tell the public that doesn’t give out personal information, it would go a long way in getting the public on board. Ms. Crotty wants to know if we are comfortable as the board discussing this information, for instance we had people that are not properly trained, handling these situations and we can’t have this. Dr. Carnemolla

took over for a second and stated that the social service person would most likely be housed at the high school because there are situations there that we have not even begun to discuss. She went over the highlights of what some of these may be. This is on top of the students we are required to service because I have plans that require, like our special needs students who need counseling time. She even let us know that she was in talks with the town to create a juvenile review board and then went over what that was. In order to have one of these we must have a social worker. As you can see, the social worker is so well needed and at this time next year, I'll probably asked for another. Mr. Lambert asked about the Wellmore grant, and it was noted that if we didn't have this grant we would have to hire either another social worker or another school psychologist. It was asked what a social worker is going to cost for the budget, and Dr. Carnemolla noted it was not going to be at the bottom of the pay scale. She is estimating the budget approximately \$60,000 a year. Mr. Vincenzi asked about the math tutor and how they would be used to the best of their ability. Dr Carnemolla showed that consultants who are retired teachers, working with our fifth-graders now have helped increase the scores in math testing however, much more is needed. Mr. Vincenzi asked about their pay scale and it was noted we would save money by hiring them outright and set of using them as a consultant. The consultant we currently have works part-time in the math tutor we would hire would be full time and working for us. This is an example of how we would save money by adding a position to our budget. Another example of this is that we have to contract out services we need under a social worker because we don't have one. Those services cost is more in the long run the social worker would.

Mr. Lambert asked by this budget is going to be different to the voters than in years past. Where is the spark to catch this year? There has been a lot of turnover and a lot of people coming in saying the same things without the scores going up. Why is it different this year? Dr. Carnemolla agreed and said this year is different truly because of the way she began this meeting saying that she can tie each and every one of the line items in the budget right back to the District's core beliefs. We have to discuss having the plan, funding it, and sticking to it. And, frankly, keeping the people around who are going to make that happen. Yes, some of this is about the consistency of leadership, and going forward, we have a vision and a process that will go year-to-year and not have to start over every year again. We can't have a one year plan we have to have at least a five year plan. The board weighed in and agreed. Ms. Crotty noted that it is also weighs in on the board and begins with the board as well. Turnover can be frustrating or exciting but either way the onus is on the board to make sure the vision goes forward. Dr. Carnemolla noted it's also important that we have to spend money on what's going to be a trajectory of improvement and unfortunately that's not always the "feel good" part of the budget. For instance, we may cut out a field trip to save some money and that upset some people, but we don't blink and I will make a math teacher. That goes back to what are our core beliefs and how do we move forward. If it doesn't fit into our three or five year plan, then we are not funding it. If it does, then we will. She then noted that if this budget doesn't pass on its first try she will not come back and just cut what was put up on the board tonight. We're talking about our priorities and what is needed to move forward and that is what this list entails. The easy way is to just cut it but that will not happen. We will go back and with the priorities again and see what is lower

on the list and then possibly begin cutting there. Ms. Rosa brought up that she has been approached to find out what are we doing about school security and mental illness. It is on the forefront of many people's minds. She feels people are not afraid to spend money when it comes to security and she also feels that they will not be afraid to spend money when it comes to social worker. It is what we need to find the children who need help and get them that help.

### **3. Adjournment**

Ms. Crotty adjourned the meeting at 7:39 p.m.

She then called for a motion to adjourn.

Subject: Motion to Adjourn

Motion Presented by: Mr. Lambert

Motion Seconded by: Ms. Wilk

Motion Passed

**Respectfully submitted by,**

**Mindi Davidson**

**Recording Secretary**