



Winooski School Board of Trustees
Special Meeting - Board Budget
Wednesday, December 18, 2024, 6:00 pm
WSD Library Learning Commons or via Google Meet
Google Meet Link: meet.google.com/szx-gwkh-oe

Policy Title 1.0 Ends Statement: All students will graduate from the Winooski School District (WSD) college and career ready at a cost supported by a majority of the Winooski community. WSD students will lead healthy, productive and successful lives and engage with their local and global community.

Attendees: Wilmer Chavarria, Krista Parisi, Sarah Haven, Robert Millar, Isaiah Donaldson, Elom Essiba, Jordan Matte, Daisy Berbeco, Chloe Tomlinson, Cheyne Racine, Martin Laraque, Matthew Gonzalez.

Virtual Attendees: Kamal Dahal, Nicole Mace, Kiera Manion-Fischer, Tayna Vyhovsky, Elijah Phillips, Jacie Barber.

1. Call to Order:

- a. Robert Millar calls the meeting to order @ 6:05 pm

2. Agenda Review and Adjustments:

- a. *None Provided.*

3. Public Comments:

- a. *None Provided.*

4. Governance Processes (Policy Section IV):

- a. Policy Title: 4.2 Board Job Description
 - i. Discussion: Presentation of Policy Priorities to Legislators
 - ii. Introductions of Board Members and Legislators.
 - iii. Robert Millar shares the slide “On Our Minds.”
 1. Addressing the complexity of the current system **without compromising the equity gains made.**
 2. Protecting the weights, particularly for **Multilingual Students** and students who live in **poverty.**
 3. Addressing unsustainable costs schools have no control over (such as healthcare)
 4. Improving access to and availability of community-based and school-based mental health clinicians to support children and families
 5. Targeting state resources to the development of affordable family (3+ bedroom units) housing

6. Ensuring public dollars do not go to schools that do not follow anti-discrimination rules
- iv. Robert Millar shares that this is an open discussion.
1. Representative Berbeco asks for clarification, about the complexity of the current system and asks that Robert specifies what is meant by “complexities of the system.” What part of the system?
 - a. Robert Millar This comes up year after year. It is difficult to explain to our residents how they get from the budget they vote to pass to what they actually pay in taxes. That has only gotten more complex. We also recognize that there are certain aspects of that that are ensuring equity. We know that there are a lot of things on the table that legislators are looking at that could have major changes.
 - b. Nicole Mace spoke to recent changes in the CLA, the impact that it had on the statewide yield figure, and how difficult it is to explain to the community, even with a clear understanding of how everything works. She notes that changes made last year were meant to help things, but made it more difficult to explain. The Board is less able to compare year-over-year changes to help give a sense of where they’ve been and where they are headed. Recognizing that our education funding formula is on the table for review, our message is that we are open to review, with the hope that we can preserve the equity in the system, while also making it clear about the investments we need for our taxpayers and voters.
 - c. To hear the discussion with representatives from Chittenden County and WSD School Board: [WSD Special Meeting - Policy Priorities to Legislators/Board Budget](#)
 2. Robert Millar calls a break at **7:02 pm**
 - a. Robert Millar calls meeting back to order @ **7:07 pm**

5. Executive Limitations (Policy Section II):

- a. Policy Title: 2.4 Financial Planning and Budgeting
 - i. **Public Outreach Event:** Isaiah Donaldson spoke about the Board Community Event that was held at WSD on Saturday, December 14th. He felt it was positive overall and went well. He does wish more community members attended. Kamal, Robert, and Elom were present as were about 15 adult community members. Those attending had good questions that were addressed during the presentation. Kamal and I gave. The Presentation concluded with an exercise that had 4 options to help the board learn what the public's thoughts are on the budget. The results were 14 for budget option 1 and 1 for budget option 2. Option 1 was the recommended reduction at the 5.9% range; Option 2 was the board-directed 4.9% range of the 3-5% we had requested. The biggest question asked was if we are looking at a massive tax rate change, why wouldn't we just keep it the same or spend more money?

- ii. Nicole Mace asks if we were able to decipher what “hats” people were wearing when they were participating. We had talked about parents, community members, students.?
 - 1. Isaiah Donaldson shares that there were 4 parents, the rest were community members.
 - a. Nicole clarified if they were residents of Winooski.
 - i. Isaiah Donaldson shares that the ones participating were residents of Winooski.
- iii. Nicole Mace It sounded like housing came up. Was that based on the conversation we just had with legislators, were folks just talking about housing, or were those separate conversations?
 - 1. Isaiah Donaldson- Those were separate in the lobby conversations. Not related, but it did come up during the day.
- iv. Elom Essiba shares that she wishes more people attended but was happy to learn what those community members were thinking.
- v. Robert Millar agreed but did find the thoughts of those who attended helpful.
- vi. Kamal Dahal voiced his appreciation of Isaiah for his organization of the event- it was well organized. We had about 50 people, with a lot of good questions. I have been talking about the budget with people who weren’t able to attend the event. They are interested in what the superintendent can say about what impact on education their children will have with the board-directed option with the reductions, or whether there will be any educational impact?! They were concerned about giving relief to those who don’t pay by income. We want to be sure that if there is a reduction, there is no impact; We have to consider folks who pay by income as well. A lot of the people I have been talking with who are working lower-paying jobs, but have students in the school, want to be sure they excel. They are looking for the next generation to climb up the economic ladder in this country.
- vii. **Presentation/Discussion: FY26 Budget Version IV Presentation**
 - 1. Wilmer Chavarria shares information from other 19 area districts (view the presentation link to see information). There were 12-13 superintendents who visited our school. These numbers are self-reported by superintendents regarding the Total Operational Budget, Total Ed Spending Increase (Ed SPending), Cost of LTWADM & Projected Tax Rate; Recognizing that area neighbors, such as Essex-Westford, Milton, Burlington, and South Burlington have not been reported. If they were to input their information, they may have changed the numbers.
 - a. Nicole Mace shares that we should expect our rate to be significantly lower since we just had a reappraisal. Nicole asks Wilmer if these numbers were after CLA or equalized rate.

- i. Wilmer Chavarria- It is after the CLA. All of them. The reason is not lower than we are projecting is that our long-term ADM is not looking great as of now. The AOE gave their second iteration of the numbers and it did not help. Over the last 24 hours, we have been engaging in some intense back and forth, internally, to ensure our ducks are in a row; Also, reaching out to the AOE trying to figure all that out. I find our current number unacceptable, I am not expecting it to remain there.
- ii. Isaiah Donaldson asks what the number is.
 1. Wilmer Chavarria shares that the first number we received was 1917, and it is lower than that. He doesn't feel comfortable sharing that because he believes it is going to change. Teams have been working tirelessly to ensure everything is in good shape. We still have to be very cautious but I am pretty confident it will be for the better. Not only could this affect us but there are two other factors not finalized yet, the yield and the CLA equalization study. I don't want you to get too excited about the projections you are seeing right now.
 2. Nicole Mace Are the calculations around cost per long-term ADM those are based on the 1917 figure?
 - a. Wilmer Chavarria No, those are based on the 2000 number. That is what I am realistically believing after everything is said and done and the AOE reflects what we are reporting that, to me, really should be the lowest– realistically the lowest I could possibly go. I am happy to bring it down to realistically the worst-case scenario, which is what we are seeing right now. If we continue on this path and don't see any change in the yield or CLA, you will still not see a change in the tax rate. That is why I am urging the board to be very cautious about the decision you make today before you adopt a budget on January 8th. Wilmer Chavarria explains the method we used last year, the number came back in our favor, we just don't know. But he doesn't want to trick the public or give any surprises.

iii. Kamal Dahal asked when we can expect to get the final version of the LTWM. Because that swing from 1917 to 2000, could change the calculus as to whether we choose option 1, 2, or 3 can shift a lot of things.

1. Wilmer Chavarria- What you are seeing is \$1.15 (tax rate) is based on the 2000. If we change the number to 1917, which is the number we are not accepting, you will still not see an increase from the current rate. You would not go above \$1.26, but barely, that is why I think you should be cautious.
2. Nicole Mace It is not out of the realm of possibility that we don't get final numbers until February, March, or April. I don't think we should foresee having a final answer before we adopt a budget on January 8th. My suggestion is that we use the number given to us, at least as of January 8th, just like we used the yield from the state.
3. Kamal Dahal- Isn't there a formula that we can use ourselves?
 - a. Wilmer Chavarria- There is. We are not distrusting the formula, we are distrusting the data they are receiving from us. The numbers we are sending are not the numbers we are seeing they have; This has been through two iterations. We aren't close to freezing yet. The AOE isn't telling any districts to use that number yet. But I agree, whatever it is on January the 8th, is what we should be going with for the time being.

2. To hear the discussion FY26 Budget Version IV Presentation: [WSD Special Meeting - Policy Priorities to Legislators/Board Budget](#)

viii. Discussion: Budget Outreach and Communication

1. Robert Millar I don't feel we have anything to share on this. We will on January the 8th when we hopefully accept a budget to share with the community.

6. **Next Agenda:**

- a. Robert Millar asks if there is anything anyone would like to see on the January 2025 agenda.
- b. Isaiah Donaldson shares that it is a regular board meeting.
 - i. Robert Millar That reminds me to share that we will have two monitoring reports.
 - ii. Wilmer Chavarria shares that he will not have a Superintendent Report, he will combine January and February.

iii. Isaiah Donaldson shares who is up for the Winooski Newsletter– it is him.

7. Upcoming Events:

- a. ~~Saturday, December 14, WSD Board Budget Community Outreach Event @ 12:30, Winooski School District Performing Arts Center~~
- b. Wednesday, December 18, WSD Special Board Budget meeting, 6 PM, Library Learning Commons
- c. Friday, December 20, Veggie VanGo
- d. Monday, December 23 - Tuesday, January 1, Winter Break - No School

8. Adjourn:

- a. Robert Millar looks for a motion to adjourn
 - i. Isaiah Donaldson- **“So Moved.”**
 - 1. **Passes unanimously.**
 - 2. Robert Millar adjourns the meeting @ ~ **8:19pm**