

Board of Apportionment & Taxation
City of Ansonia

RECEIVED FOR FILE

16 FEB 19 AM 10:08

Christina Branch
TOWN AND CITY CLERK
ANSONIA, CONNECTICUT

The Board of Apportionment & Taxation of the City of Ansonia held a Budget Workshop on Wednesday, February 17, 2016 in the Aldermanic Chambers of Ansonia City Hall. The purpose of the workshop was to discuss the proposed budget for Fiscal Year 2016-2017 for the Board of Education.

Members Present

Ms. Blackwell
Mr. Cassetti
Mr. Duffus
Mr. Lopez
Mr. Smerznak
Mr. King

Members Absent

Mr. Veillette

The Board rose for the Pledge of Allegiance. The record shows 6 members present.

In attendance from the Board of Education were Dr. Carol Merlone, Superintendent, Mr. Michael Wilson, Asst. Superintendent, and Mr. James Gaskins, Business Manager.

Dr. Merlone opened up the workshop wanted to clear up some misconceptions regarding the Board of Education. The presentation of the 2016-2017 budget is before the City. The Board of Education understands the fiscal crisis the City is facing, however the Board of Education is also facing a fiscal crisis with the rising cost of Special Education and the reduced funding at the State level the Board of Education is forced to use funding from general education to continue the funding of special education at the State mandated level.

The School Building Project is now 15 years old, requiring facilities to need attention. Ansonia has 72% of their students on free or reduced lunch, and administrators have an extended role beyond management. Ansonia has become a training ground for teachers, they begin their career here and move on for better salaries, Ansonia is beginning to lose administrators as well now.

Mr. Wilson presented the Board with a hand out on Administration Levels in small size school systems, showing a total of 12 Administrator for 2,400 children ranking Ansonia last at a rate of 200 students per administrator.

A second handout was supplied on Special Education. The climb in cost for special education is raising \$1,000,000 per fiscal year, with out of district cost rising approximately \$300,000 per year. Special Education is growing at a rate of 2-3% a year Ansonia currently has 518 students in the Special Education Program. The 2014 Budget has 18% of the students uses 29% of the total budget (as mandated by the State). The figures projected for 2015 are 20% of the students using 32% of the budget.

Also presented to the Board was the locally funded versus the Grant funding from 2009-2015. In 2009 78% locally funded with 22% coming from grants, in 2015 the trend is 42% locally funded with 58% coming from grants.

The last bit of information Mr. Wilson shared with the Board was the reimbursement for special education that the City is receiving versus what they should be receiving: Actual Amount received \$582,040 6.38% versus what should be received: \$3,647,320 40%.

The ECS amount received \$16,106,686 72.30% versus \$22,264,940 100%.

James Gaskin, Business Manager

Mr. Gaskin presented the Board with a complete overview of the 2016-2017 Operating Budget. The average percentage increase over the last 7 years is 2.34%, this increase would be fine if other demands did not eat into the budget. The Superintendent submitted a 7.7% increase over last year, the Board of Education reduced that request down by .98% to 6.79% increase.

Increases received from the City do not meet the needs of the rising cost of the Education Budget. If the Board would review the Object Summary they would see most accounts have decreases with the exception of Salaries and Benefits.

Ansonia is 160 out of 165 Town and Cities in Connecticut on funding per pupil. What happens if the 6.79% increase isn't approved, teachers approximately 10, one administrator, one head count in the facilities department would be eliminated. There is no other place the Education can take the funding from. The Board of Education is tied to how to fund Special Education and the funding as the state level is decreasing, cities cannot continue at this rate.

Teachers and Administrators are always writing grants looking for funding anywhere for any amount, no funding is hurting the children of Ansonia not the teachers. Reduction in teachers will lead to an increase in class sizes.

Ms. Blackwell commended the Board of Education for a job well done; she has three children in the system. Where is the discussion on the HSA Benefit with the Union, those savings can be put right back into the Education Budget.

Ms. Merlone advised there was one meeting with another within days, but keep in mind the contract is not up for negotiations, unlike the other city unions the teachers are in the middle of their contract. We will have to see where those talks go.

Teachers and Administrators have all taken freeze over the years.

It seems the course of action that needs to be taken at this point is to establish a committee to go to Hartford and address Legislation. Special Education is bleeding the City, we can no longer continue at this rate.

There are portable classrooms being brought up to Mead to try to bring the cost of special education down but even those savings will not be realized until next year.

There were some questions regarding the percentage increase in benefits, Mr. Gaskins advised those percentages are skewed based on steps and levels.

Mr. Nimmons advised unless Ansonia sees some Economic Development within the City they will not be able to maintain education at this level.

When asked what happens if Ansonia can't fund Education, the State of Connecticut comes in and takes over. All contracts would be dissolved.

The Board thanked the Administration of the Board of Education for their input. Everything will be considered.

Aside from the information presented this evening the Board did note that the Mayor's Budget does not include salary increases as proposed by the contract negotiations.

Mr. Duffus made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Ms. Blackwell seconded the motion. The motion was approved. The meeting was adjourned at 8:10 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Donna Duclos
Secretary Board of Apportionment & Taxation