

Cape Elizabeth
School Board and Town Council
Workshop
Highlights Report

Tuesday, October 23, 2018, Cape Elizabeth, Maine



Good Group Decisions

About the Workshop

Attendance

Town Council Members:

- James M. Garvin
- Penelope A. Jordan
- Valerie A. Randall
- Christopher M. Straw

School Board Members:

- Heather Altenburg
- Kimberly Carr
- Susana Measelle Hubbs
- M. Nasir Shir
- Hope Straw
- John Voltz

Staff:

- Matt Sturgis, Town Manager
- Donna Wolfrom, Superintendent

Objectives

- Shared understanding of the One Town Concept, our roles and responsibilities, our roles and perspectives on school budgeting process
- General conclusion about how to improve the process going forward including holding ourselves accountable

Ground Rules

- We are One Town.
- This is a discussion among members of the School Board, the Town Council, the Schools Superintendent, and the Town Manager.
- Our focus is on understanding the present to improve the future.
- All views heard, recognized by the facilitator.
- Flexible agenda.
- Themes and conclusions now and later.

Planned Agenda

- 6:00 **Dinner**
Provided for members of the School Board and Town Council
- 6:30 **Opening**
- School Board Chair, Susana Measelle Hubbs, will open the workshop with some welcoming remarks
 - Facilitator, Craig Freshley, will explain the Workshop format and a few simple ground rules
- 6:40 **Public Comment**
An opportunity for any member of the public to make a brief comment.
- 6:45 **The One Town Concept**
Town Manager, Matt Sturgis, will briefly explain the One Town Concept.
- 6:50 **Shared Understanding**
We will have a facilitated discussion in which we share perspectives and listen to each other with respect and empathy. We will pay particular attention to understanding:
- The One Town Concept
 - The legal roles and responsibilities of each entity
 - Each other's perspectives on the school budget development process
- 7:30 **How to Work Together Going Forward**
What are some principles, practices, or attitudes that we should keep in mind as we embark on developing the next school budget?
- We will answer this question first with everyone contributing their ideas and getting them up on the wall.
 - We will then discuss, organize, and prioritize the ideas.
 - We will try to come to some general conclusions.
- 8:00 **Accountability**
- Assuming we agree on some principles, practices, and attitudes to implement going forward, what should we do if we are unable to implement things as agreed?
 - What should you do if you see things breaking down?
 - How will we hold ourselves accountable?
 - We will brainstorm answers to these questions and try to come to some conclusions.
- 8:20 **Closing comments**

Each member of the Council and School Board will have a chance to make a brief closing comment, perhaps a reflection about the retreat or perhaps a particular hope or concern going forward.

8:30 **Adjourn**

Public Comment

There was an opportunity for public comment with several members of the public in attendance, but no members of the public chose to make any comments.

The One Town Concept

Town Manager, Matt Sturgis, provided a brief overview of The One Town Concept as follows:

- First developed in 1970s
 - Tried to find creative ways to enhance services and save tax dollars
- Business Functions
 - Business office reports to the Superintendent
 - Several functions handled by this office
 - This also allows us to have improved purchasing power
- Maintenance of Buildings and Grounds
 - Reports to the Superintendent – takes care of the buildings
 - Public works takes care of the fields
 - Custodians serve both school and municipal buildings
 - School buses handled by public works
 - Transportation managed by facilities
- Community Services
 - Reports to the Town Manager
 - Budget supported by fees
- Technology
 - All maintained by school technology department
 - Award winning website
- Changes have been made over time

- This arrangement has saved the town an estimated \$2m per year
 - Clarified that savings are mostly due to salary savings and that savings are generally allocated to both Schools and the Town
- We are always looking to make improvements
- Important to have a good relationship between the Manager and Superintendent
- Overall this works very well, although we always need to be finding ways to do things better
- Clarifications about accountability
 - We need more clarity about this

Shared Understanding

For about 45 minutes School Board Members and Town Council Members asked questions of each other and provided their own perspectives to increase shared understanding of their roles and the school budget development process. During the conversation, Craig made notes of ideas for going forward that were then considered later in the meeting.

Ideas for Going forward

Craig presented the following ideas on the wall as reflections of things suggested by members of the town council and school board. The group discussed some of these ideas, but not all of them. (Not in any particular order)

- Amend the Charter so the Council doesn't have to approve the school budget
- More trust, more communication, more engagement
- Consider a joint resolution between the School Board and Town Council
 - We support One Town
 - We should do joint five-year planning
- Clear documentation and shared understanding of the budgeting process
 - Should be more efficient and effective than the current process
 - The process should include

- Opportunity for advance requests for information and advance sharing of information (no surprises)
 - Shared standards for evaluating the school budget – micro and macro
 - That specific things are looked at as part of the budget process
 - For instance: Ratio of staffing to students
- There should be protocols for handling conflict and providing recourse
 - Better documentation of what's included in each budget line
 - There should be full accounting of all expenditures that support the schools whether or not part of the school budget
 - More clarity about who is accountable for what aspects of operations, functions, and facilities
 - Collaborative long-term planning
 - Take facilities out of the school budget
 - Consider funding school facilities with town funds

Emerging Conclusion

At the end of the workshop as time was running out, Craig offered the following conclusion:

There is a lot of interest and perhaps even an emerging consensus to amend the charter so that the Town Council need not approve the school budget. There is enough energy in the room to take a look at that, and try to explore the unintended consequences and the benefits.

It seems to me that it's unlikely that it will happen prior to the next budgeting cycle so you'll have to go through the school budgeting cycle as is again for the next cycle.

I'm hearing a real willingness that you want it to be better this time. And we've had a good discussion about how to make it better. There are some principles here that I think are worth calling out.

- Would be good to have really clear documentation and shared understanding of the school budgeting process at the outset.
- The School Board can propose some guiding principles and give the Council assurance that as part of the process you will be looking at these things that will help Council later

on. And it's incumbent upon the School Board to be proactive about doing that so it doesn't seem like the Council is prescribing what should be the criteria or the standards. School Board, you get out front and say, "We have developed a budget based on the following criteria and standards." There are a lot of Council Members around this room that will feel good about that.

- I think it would be good to put some thought into establishing a process in the event there is a conflict or someone feels there should be recourse; what that should be. Something about accountability.
- Lastly, this notion of shared long-term planning, especially facilities planning. That may not have to do with this immediate budget cycle coming up, but it has come up in this meeting. Whether you amend the charter or however you change your budgeting process, I can see some energy in this room for more collaboration around long-term facilities planning.

While there was no formal consensus or agreement with Craig's proposed conclusion, there seemed to be general agreement and no significant dissent.

Closing Comments

Town Manager, Matt Sturgis reflected that this was a very good conversation.

Superintendent, Donna Wolfrom offered to both Council Members and School Board Members: "Whatever information you want from me or my office, please just ask."

Town Council Members and School Board Members were each given an opportunity to make a closing comment. Comments were as follows:

- This has been a great opportunity for the two boards to get together.
- We should have joint leadership meetings going forward, for instance, the Superintendent, City Manager, School Board Chair, and Town Council Chair.
- I like the idea of collaborative long-term capital planning.
- We should explore having a follow-up meeting.
- This was a great meeting, although I wish we could have made more progress on developing a specific plan going forward.
- It's important that we clarify and document the One Town Concept.

- It's important to clarify constraints that the School Board had to operate under, and has to operate with going forward.
- Even if the charter is amended, it would be good to have the Council weigh in on the school budget.
- Regular joint meetings of the School Board and Town Council would be good going forward.
- Love the idea of coordinating for long-term planning.
- Would be good to have a next meeting and make a specific plan for the process for developing the upcoming budget.
- This meeting was good for understanding each other, really great, but our work feels unfinished. We need action steps.
- Thanks to Susanna and Donna for organizing this.
- There's more good work to be done.
- Thanks to everyone for being honest and sincere.
- Hope we proceed with open and transparent communications.
- This was very helpful.
- I'm very optimistic going into the next budgeting season.
- Appreciate this opportunity.
- We are closer to each other than we imagined we were.
- Thanks to each of you for your service.
- Thanks to Craig for facilitating.
- Thanks to Matt and Donna for organizing.
- Communication is critical.
- We need a follow-up meeting.

- Even if we don't change the charter immediately, let's be flexible in our approach to the next budget cycle.
- Monthly meetings among these two groups, or the leadership of these two groups, would be good.
- A School Board goal this year is to improve the budget process.
- Thanks to everyone for being honest.

The meeting adjourned at 8:32pm.