

Town of Bedford Finance Committee

Town Hall, Selectmen's Meeting Room

January 30, 2014

Members in attendance: Rich Bowen, Tom Busa, Bob Kenney, Elizabeth McClung, Barbara Perry, Mike Seibert (Chair), Steve Steele, Ben Thomas.

Also in attendance: Donna Clements, *Instructional Technology Program Director, Bedford Schools*; Dave Coelho, *Finance Director, Bedford Schools*; Victor Garofalo, *Director of Finance and Collector/Treasurer, Town of Bedford*; Ann Guay, *School Committee*; Brad Hafer, *School Committee*; Michael McAllister, *School Committee*; Bill Moonan, *Selectmen (Chair)*; Ed Pierce, *School Committee (Chair)*; Rick Reed, *Town Manager*; Abbie Seibert, *School Committee*; Jon Sills, *Superintendent of Schools*; Max Turkewitz, *Network Administrator, Bedford Schools*.

Bedford Schools FY15 Budget: Fin Com guideline budget= \$ 35,201,473 (2.88%)

School Committee approved budget =\$35, 843,029 (4.8%)

Superintendent Sills began the budget presentation by re-capping of much of the same material that was presented at the FinCom's December 5, 2013 meeting. The budget proposal at that time anticipated a request for an increase over FY14 of 6.7% with drivers identified as changing student demographics with increasing complexity of needs; tools (technological) to differentiate instruction; in-house SpEd program growth that avoids more costly outside placements; collective bargaining. The complexity of needs driver includes a greater number of English Language Learners (ELL) as well as the impact of the homeless student population who are housed temporarily by the State at the Plaza Hotel.

After a month of discussions, the Superintendent has proposed—and School Committee has approved—cuts to the original proposal that have brought down the requested increase to 4.8% or \$1,630,461 over FY14. Areas in which the original budget proposal was reduced include: CASE Collaborative tuition savings (\$150,000); reduction to the collective bargaining reserve (\$215,000); several small reductions in technology (\$5,400); reduction to Facilities (\$42,031) and out of district SpEd placement savings of \$80,485.

The one caveat Mr. Sills spoke of in this list of cuts related to the unknown number of kindergarteners coming in next fall. He said that a 9th classroom might be necessary, if warranted by enrollment, and in that case the Schools would come back to FinCom so that an additional full-time teacher (\$62,553) and a .9 educational assistant (\$16,300) could be hired.

One of the drivers of the budget increase is the so-called "steps and lanes" salary increase, negotiated during the last round of contract collective bargaining. It was reported that about half of the current staff are "on the steps" while the other half are at the top of the pay scale. The steps and lanes of the increase (\$307,480 or 18.66%) is the amount contractually due to existing staff for FY15.

Additionally, another \$65,000 will be used to hire a new, full-time Assistant Superintendent to replace out-going Claire Jackson who is now working part-time. This hire will not add to the total number of School-side FTEs.

Utilities costs are also going up so the School Committee has approved a raise to the electricity line item from \$506,612 to \$579,141.

Posing a question in the area of increased complexity of need, Mr. Kenney asked what qualifies a student as “low income”. Mr. Sills replied that it is based on those who apply for free/ reduced lunch. He noted that not all who would qualify complete the application process but that it’s the most accurate way the district has of accounting for the size of this population.

Mr. Busa asked what the anticipated increase in salary for existing staff would be, given current contract negotiations. Mr. Sills replied that he believed, once the contract is settled, it would be in the 4% range. Mr. Busa said that the Town only takes in 2 ½% annually and that perpetual salary increases of 4% “in the largest line item in the Town” would result in “ongoing problems with School budget.” He added that this would have “ripple effect” on all other departments’ budgets.

Mr. Sills asked whether Town revenue was expected to grow. Mr. Busa replied that Town revenue grows at 2.5% a year, plus new growth. Adding the new growth potential into the equation, Mr. Busa said that given historic levels of new growth, increases over a previous year could be as high as 3.1% or 3.2%, with the best year in recent record equaling 3.5%. If the commercial base does grow, as it is hoped, that will serve only to shift the tax burden from residential to business but not change the 2.5% increase factor. Impacts from State and federal aid increases are unknown and changes from year to year.

Mr. Sills asked for some information on salary increases in the past, saying that in his experience they have risen 4% in the past. Mr. Busa agreed that these kinds of salary increases have occurred but that they have caused the School budget to consume a greater proportion of the Town budget, going from “50% to over 60%.”

Mr. Sills said the Schools are “impacted directly by all the demographic changes going on in Bedford, in ways that the other areas in town are not affected.” Class sizes and the need for services have grown due to the increasing number of students and increasing needs of students.

Mr. Busa replied that the question was not one of increasing the number of FTEs to serve those students. The question was one of the raises in salaries for existing employees.

School Committee Chair Pierce said that part of the issue of salary increase is based on teacher starting pay. New teachers are hired at 56% of the top pay level. It takes 13 years, in increments of about 4.9% annually, for a new hire to reach the top of the professional pay scale in Bedford. With half the staff on the steps and half the staff at the top, 50% get a step raise and the other half –at the top of the steps– get only COLA increases.

Looking at the maintenance staff in the Facilities department—a department shared proportionately with the Town— Mr. Pierce said that the Town starts new hires at 93% of the top step. These employees get a lower annual step increase –1.6% instead of 4%

Mr. Pierce said that Mr. Coelho had been asked to calculate what it would cost to bring school staff on the steps into alignment with the Town-side step scale in an effort to reduce the percentage of growth of the salary line item on the School-side. The answer, Mr. Pierce reported, amounts to a \$1.8M increase to the School budget each year.

Mr. Coelho said his calculation was based on 97 teachers (today's count) who would jump between 1 and 7 steps to get to levels to match Town-side employees. New teachers would then be hired in at higher initial rates and teachers on the steps would continue to get step increases until they reached the highest step.

Mr. Busa reiterated that the Schools' salary line item saddles the Town with an ongoing guideline issues; how the problem is fixed is something that needs to be discussed and addressed.

Mr. Pierce asked the Finance Committee to look at the issue differently: if the Schools didn't have enrollment spikes and so many unfunded mandates to deal with, budget proposals would be within the guideline. This year, the FinCom guideline increase was \$ 986,000 over FY14.

Mr. Bowen asked for clarification: if enrollment had remained steady, would that guideline figure have been enough?

Mr. Pierce and Mr. Sills responded that, with the current numbers, current needs, and current mandates, that number would be sufficient. Mr. Bowen then agreed with Mr. Busa about the rate of teacher salary increase and urged the Schools to proceed with care in negotiating the new labor contract.

Upon request, Mr. Sills identified the average professional salary as \$ 74,000. The average has gone down from \$78,000/\$79,000—the result of long-term employee retirements—but is rising once again toward \$75,000. At Mr. Bowen's request, Mr. Coelho said he would provide the Finance Committee with an accounting of the average salary of a professional School employee. Mr. Sills will provide information about salary ranges in neighboring towns that he has researched to aid the labor contract negotiations.

Mr. Sills and Mr. Coelho said the current contract now in its third year had "very minimal" increases. Mr. Busa said he believed the growth in the current contract was 8.9% over three years, or 3% per year. This is the sort of contract that should commonly be approved because it mirrors the rate of Town revenue growth.

Mr. Sills said if Bedford didn't pay its teachers competitive salaries, teachers would work elsewhere. Mr. Busa responded that while he understood this, it didn't change the fact that cities and towns declare bankruptcy when expenses grow faster than revenue.

Ms. Perry said that a major difference between the Town-side and the School-side salaries is that the Town-side salary plan bylaw is a guideline and the School-side is contractual and is therefore guaranteed income. There's no guarantee on the Town-side that an employee will move up a step but on the School-side there is.

Mr. Pierce said that steps came in during the 60's when baby boomers hit the schools and towns struggled to afford a sudden need for more teachers. Adding steps was how towns staggered the expense.

Ms. Perry asked whether the level of cuts proposed by the Schools was sustainable. For example, would reducing the collective bargaining line item by \$215,000 leave enough for the negotiation?

Mr. Sills said it was his hope that the remaining \$474,189 would be enough; he is committed to the reduction and said he wouldn't need to come back to FinCom about this.

Mr. Steele asked about insurance costs for existing staff. Mr. Garofalo responded that the figure is about \$200,000 according to his calculations, although it could be less. Mr. Steele asked what step level is used when Schools budget for a new position. Mr. Sills said the new hire is estimated at step 6 but they try to hire lower than that. Mr. Coelho said that this year the difference between salaried-as- budgeted and the actual amount was about \$68,000. Whatever the amount is annually, that figure is accounted as funds in the School Committee Reserve. It later affects the next year's budget and is shows as a reduction.

Mr. Steele referred to the lower salary of the current, part-time Asst. Superintendent, asking how the reduction in her pay was handled. Mr. Pierce said the reduction was itemized within the budget. Mr. Steele asked to see the detail on that reduction because he couldn't recall it had happened in the way described.

Referring to a next tier of cuts beyond those that were approved by the School Committee, Mr. Steele asked if the \$191,875 listed under "Staff" would be from proposed additional staff proposed or if it would come from existing staff. Mr. Coelho replied that it would be reductions to current—not proposed— staff.

Referring to the Schools' Special Accounts and Grants, Mr. Steele said the accounts hold "significant funds". Mr. Coelho said when he develops the budget each year, he uses "a fair amount of money" from the Building Rental account to offset facilities costs. The Circuit Breaker account goes to SpEd costs. Some of the other accounts are restricted and can only be used for very restricted expenses.

Mr. Steele pointed specifically to the accounts that can be used for technology needs, like "E-rate Reimbursement". Mr. Coelho said that the Schools receive about \$20,000 a year from rebates but use about \$25,000 a year for the purchase of computers "and other technology assets." This income and outgo is built into the budget and is detailed in an offset sheet that shows these sorts of transactions.

Ms. McClung asked about the proposed 16 FTE additions system-wide in the original budget. Mr. Sills said that some of these 16 were teaching assistants; not all were professional staff. He and Mr. Pierce

said that the approved cuts and the next tier of cuts together equal about 10 FTEs, although these reductions are not limited to new hires since some existing positions were deemed less crucial than some of the proposed new positions.

Ms. McClung asked if projected retirees have been taken into account in the budget. Mr. Coelho said that had and the savings were already “netted out.”

Ms. McClung asked how other towns’ contracts have been settled recently. Mr. Sills reported the trend in the State is 2/2/2% for COLA. Ms. McClung asked for information about comparison town contract settlements which Mr. Sills agreed to supply. Ms. McClung said she aware of COLA increases that are lower than 2/2/2. She added that the perception of the step increases on the School-side is that they are “a promotion” but said that having only 4 steps over the course of an entire teacher’s career –as is done on the Town side—“doesn’t make sense” because the value of a veteran teacher is greater than that of a new hire by a large degree.

Moving on to the subject of technology that will have its own presentation later in the meeting, Ms. McClung wondered about the trade-off of resources spent on technology versus money to pay additional teachers to address bulging class enrollments.

Mr. Sills said that one-to-one will not be continued down through the grades because “the needs in the buildings don’t call for that.” The iPad program, he reported, has cost about \$50,000 a year. Mr. Coelho added that each lease is, in fact, \$50,000 each year: the first year the contract was \$50,000, the next was \$100,000 and the third was \$150,000. In the third year of the program, there are 3 leases totaling \$300,000.

Mr. Kenney asked about out of district SpEd placement numbers. Mr. Coelho explained the net increase of about \$70,000 includes a CASE decrease (based on tuition and transportation) of \$150,000 so that out of district placement is about \$81,000 less than it was in FY14. The increase in cost for in-house SpEd—about \$222,000—has to do with additional staff such as an additional psychologist, a re-categorization for the teachers of the integrated pre-school and teaching assistants for the Bridge program at each of the schools. The \$69,000 line item for SpEd is for increases, specifically for out-of-district tuition.

Mr. Sills said that the out of district SpEd costs are \$5M- \$6M annually, the lion’s share for tuition. This includes transportation (about \$10,000) for each child. Some students who are educated in town are given SpEd services that are billed by out-of-district providers and those costs are included in the \$5-6M. Mr. Sills said this total would be even higher if Bedford did not belong to three SpEd collaboratives. The average cost per student of a member town for placement in one of the collaboratives is \$50,000 versus \$60,000-\$100,000 for non-members.

In response to these costs, the district has created in-house programs so that fewer students are placed outside; currently those in-house programs are servicing 160 students with varying degrees of need. Mr. Sills said that half that number would probably have been placed out-of-district if in-house programs had not been created.

Mr. Thomas recalled a proposed FTE for Lane School that was reported in the December presentation. He questioned whether the numbers truly called for an additional classroom. Mr. Sills said that without the additional teacher for the 3rd grade, enrollments would be at the upper limits of the guideline. Given the complexities of student needs now versus when the class enrollment guidelines were created, it is better to err on the side of lower enrollments than higher enrollments so that students will be served and standardized tests scores can improve in the way they need to at this level.

Mr. Thomas said that finding the money to pay for additions to the staff is problematic. Knowing the background of the issue is helpful but it doesn't make the problem of paying for proposed solutions go away. Fairness to the other Town departments' budget needs is also important.

FinCom Chair Seibert asked, if the more drastic cuts scenario had to be implemented, would the reductions affect programs? Mr. Sills replied that this level of reductions would affect proposed staff increases that accomplish class-size relief, SpEd support in the Bridge program, and the Lane School foreign language program. Additionally, in the ELL program, the more severe level of cuts means the loss of a .2 ELL support staff at BHS and would make Bedford further out of compliance with the State guideline than it already is: Bedford is now being "called to task" by the Coordinated Program Review for lower-than-recommended ELL support levels.

Mr. Sills pointed out that the zero percent increase in the "supply" line item for the last ten years has means that teachers take money from their own pockets to buy supplies or parents are called upon to contribute to bridge the gap.

Mr. Seibert asked about the non-infrastructure part of the technology budget. If the information is not broken out in the upcoming presentation, he asked that it be sent to the Finance Committee at a later time.

Mr. Seibert also asked for an historic accounting of enrollment by school, including professional FTEs.

Mr. Busa asked how many out of district placements there are currently. Mr. Sills said there are 86 students out-of- district.

Mr. Sills sits on the boards of all three SpEd collaboratives Bedford belongs to. He and his colleagues strive to provide the highest quality programming at the best possible cost to the member districts. The boards also have a say in the collective bargaining contracts for the teachers and other professionals in the collaboratives. CASE is in the process of revising the way it assesses its programs. The board is considering a change to how payments for members versus non-members are assessed.

Mr. Busa pointed to the Special Accounts, Grants and Funds, saying—like other departments in town—the Schools are "sitting on piles of money." He asked specifically about the Mudge account that has currently \$222,641.04. The fund principle of \$14,000 must be left intact but the remainder could be used as a budget offset.

Mr. Coelho said the Mudge fund was started in 1914 for specific recreation purposes. He said the

interest revenue has been used in the past but the Schools have deliberately refrained from digging into the account to preserve the fund for future generations rather than being “a pig at the trough.

Mr. Bowen asked what an “M1” or new hire gets paid. Mr. Coelho answered that it is about \$40,000. Mr. Bowen asked for a complete detail of salary ranges to be sent to the Committee.

Ms. Perry asked about the FTEs for the integrated preschool. Mr. Sills said tuition offsets most of the preschool program and that salaries are most of the cost of the program.

Ms. Perry asked whether all students categorized as SpEd students are in a special program. Mr. Sills replied that students in the “moderate special needs” category make up the majority of SpEd students in Bedford. They are fully mainstreamed but get additional in-class or pull-out specialized instruction. Other students are on 504s which are not considered SpEd because it’s a “lower threshold of need.” Then, there are the in-house programs created to better serve students and to avoid out-of –district placements. These students are partially included in regular classroom activities during the day and are not in fully-separate programs. Mr. Sills says it is the students who the district cannot serve that are sent out of district.

Mr. Sills also reported that an effort is being made to refer fewer students for SpEd services.

Mr. Steele asked about the reduction of \$2,000 for keyboards. Ms. Clements of the Technology department reported that the original quote was higher than the final total by that amount. The district is buying 200 keyboards, specifically for the PARCC exams.

The impracticality of complying with the requirements of PARCC was acknowledged and Mr. Sills said it is a crisis for all school districts, state-wide. Mr. Steele said that the State is likely to make accommodations if most districts are unable to comply; Bedford could hold back from spending money that might not need to be spent in the final analysis.

Mr. Sills said that districts are expected to try to accommodate. If the technology isn’t available, the districts will have to buy the paper and pencil tests. Because of the nature of the tests and the way they are formatted, students taking paper and pencil versions of the test will be at a disadvantage. Students could take the tests on laptops but the infrastructure still needs to be upgraded to accommodate more devices at a time to narrow the test-taking window as much as possible: the larger the window, the more disruption to the academic schedule.

Mr. Steele asked how many students will have to take the tests. Mr. Sills replied that this year, the tests are being piloted only. Next year, either every child will take PARCC or take the MCAS for one final year—districts will have a choice. At first, PARCC will be administered to all grades except K-2 grades, although it has been reported that tests for those grades are being developed. Computers will be rotated through the schools so that there is sufficient capacity where it is needed.

Mr. Steels said it seemed unreasonable to expect districts to come up with enough computers. Mr. Sills said that mandates without funding is what the State does. Some kind of subsidy for towns is being

discussed in the legislature but “it’s a pittance” compared to what it will cost and the larger subsidies will go to poorer communities.

Mr. Steele asked about the accounts and funds that are being cleaned up and whether the balances will have an effect on the Free Cash bottom line. As a result of credit balances in these school accounts, about \$280,000 did not revert to Free Cash during the last round of certification. Mr. Garofalo said, once the account balances are cleaned up, there will be “a positive effect” for Free Cash. He added that there are also positive adjustments being made on the Town side, too.

Ms. McClung asked about steps and whether the Schools hire in at step zero. Mr. Sills said he did and confirmed that step zero with a Masters was \$47,000; step twelve with a Masters is about \$84,000.

Asking about PARCC testing, Ms. McClung said she’d heard that some districts might not go with PARCC. Mr. Sills said that the Board of Education—with some dissention—voted to begin a two-year pilot process to field test the exam. Several third grades and fifth grades across the Commonwealth have been chosen to pilot and Bedford is one of the testing sites. Next year, the intent is to tell districts to administer all MCAS or all PARCC tests. Mr. Sills—along with others in his Superintendents’ Association—is advocating for another form of testing called the Smarter Balance test. It’s a form of adaptive testing that responds to how well a student scores on one test before deciding the level of testing for the next round. The scores go back immediately to the district so that schools can respond quickly to what the tests reveal about student proficiency levels. PARCC, Mr. Sills said, will provide test results no quicker than MCAS does.

Mr. Sills sees good in the PARCC testing format but he also has some concerns, such as how—for example—rigor is defined.

Ms. McClung expressed concern over the potential loss of the Lane language program, vis-à-vis the effect on the classroom and whether there were costs associated. Mr. Sills replied that there were no contractual issues with classroom time. He added that one potential benefit of eliminating the language program is that time-in- learning on core subject would become less fractured with fewer interruptions.

Ms. Perry said if there’s a chance that PARCC might not implemented, money should not be spent until a final decision has been made. Mr. Sills replied that the district “doesn’t have the luxury of waiting” and “nobody thinks it’s not coming.” The content and skills tested in PARCC is very different from MCAS, regardless of the technology needs. “If we were not to prepare them, they would truly suffer,” Mr. Sills said.

Technology presentation: Ms. Clements and Mr. Turkewitz reported that the technology program at Bedford Schools is part of the Vision and strategic plan for the district. Referring to Bloom’s Taxonomy, Ms. Clements said the goal was the development of higher order thinking skills in a student –centered learning environment. Technology is used as a tool for collaboration as well as for self-paced and differentiated learning. Technology adds educational value and enhances learning, Ms. Clements said.

Even though iPads are being used for the one-to-one program at the high school, computer labs are still needed for some content areas like foreign language, drafting, programming, robotics and the arts.

Ms. Clements emphasized that the power of the iPad is in the applications.

Students will need the skills they develop as collaborators and “makers” or creators, both in college and in the workplace.

Ms. Clements said that the department she now heads has been restructured from 3 separate departments: data specialists, network specialists, tech instructional staff and librarians are now all under one umbrella. She added that there is a need for an additional technician to service the greater number and variety of devices.

Ms. Clements listed current hardware needs to meet the district’s vision:

BHS: Each student, teacher and administrator now has an iPad. However, desktops and laptops still needed. Handhelds not always appropriate.

JGMS: 2 carts of mobile devices per team for each grade level. There are 2 teams per grade and 4 content area teachers per team. Also, there are many “specialists” such as ELL, SpEd, Reading, Foreign Language, Tech Ed, Art, Music and PE. Ms. Clements said her assessment is that 4 carts of mobile devices be available for them.

Lane: Right now a pilot is being run with a 3rd grade and a 5th grade teacher sharing a cart. Ms. Clements wants to have 4 carts of mobile devices per grade level and 2 carts to be shared by the specialists. Desktops and laptops already in the classroom should be maintained.

Davis: Not as many devices are needed there because of the developmental level of the students. A pilot program currently there has 3 2nd grade teachers sharing a cart that allows them to use 4-6 devices at a time to help with small group instruction within the classroom. Ideally, with 8 classes per grade level and 3 grade levels, the goal is for 96 devices per grade level. An additional mobile cart is desired for occasions when whole classrooms can engage in the same activity. Two carts are desired for the specialists as well.

Mr. Turkewitz then spoke about the status of the network infrastructure: there are hardware and the bandwidth issues, including access points, wireless controllers, switches, core switches and servers. He said that problems now occur when multiple devices are used in some areas of JGMS, Lane and Davis. PARCC testing will require greater bandwidth and compatibility between networks and devices.

For Davis and Lane, Mr. Turkewitz recommended an additional two network switches for port availability to support new access points, an increase bandwidth and Replacements/upgrades to the wireless system for complete coverage in building.

For the middle school, Mr. Turkewitz recommended completing Phase 2 of an infrastructure plan to replace existing wireless devices, expand coverage and add a wireless controller. Phase one, now completed, replaced aging network equipment.

Over time, recommended upgrades as enumerated would cost: FY15 \$160,000; FY16 \$174,000; FY17 \$344,000; FY18 no cost projected; FY 19 \$ 32,000; FY20 no cost projected; FY21 \$630,000; FY 22 \$180,000; FY23 \$213,000. The life span of infrastructure hardware like access points and wireless controllers is estimated at 7 years.

Mr. Kenney asked what the current technology budget is. Ms. Clements replied that it is \$ 430,000—an amount included within the current budget proposal. Mr. Sills said it includes 139 replacement PCs (done in a planned replacement cycle), 62 of which are at the high school. Mr. Steele asked Mr. Sills to provide FinCom with the chart showing hardware equipment age/status that was distributed at the most recent School Committee meeting.

Mr. Kenney asked if Mr. Sills believes technology investments improve the education of Bedford students. Mr. Sills' answer was an unequivocal "Yes" although he acknowledged a difficult trade-off between "tech and teacher." Mr. Kenney said that his sense is that teachers should be a higher priority.

Mr. Thomas said one of his feelings about technology is that it can give you more for less. For example, he had hoped the iPads would lower the textbook budget, but that this hasn't happened. He addressed a question to Mr. Turkewitz about "the bottleneck at Lane" and the capacity to administer PARCC. Mr. Turkewitz replied that the problem at Lane is connectivity to the internet. There are two issues: everyday connectivity and connectivity capacity for the PARCC testing timeframe. "There is not enough capacity and coverage with the existing access points," Turkewitz said.

Ms. Clements added that connectivity can depend on where you are in the building. Some the current access points can't handle the volume required.

Mr. Thomas asked if upgrading the school in phases would work. Mr. Turkewitz replied that if the only concern was PARCC, the upgrade could be done in phases but it would not address the everyday needs. When multiple classrooms share an access point and are using mobile devices, the access points can't handle the traffic. Mr. Sills added that fulfilling the technology vision necessitates adding wireless capacity.

Mr. Thomas asked if the access point could be a fixture of the cart itself. Mr. Turkewitz replied that others who have tried that solution have now abandoned it. When it is plugged and unplugged, connectivity can be lost for devices elsewhere in the building.

Mr. Thomas moved to the technology needs at BHS, asking why the Town should supply public access to the internet for devices other than the iPads during school hours. Mr. Turkewitz answered that guests at the school often need to access the internet and that personal devices not shut off automatically seek access and therefore slow down classroom connectivity. Essentially, having public access keeps non-classroom devices off the school network. It has been demonstrated that students accessing the public

network during the day slow down the speed of the public network. Mr. Thomas said he remained concerned about the issue.

Mr. Thomas asked how much had been spent for infrastructure improvements over the past few years. Mr. Sills answered that \$185,000 was spent at the high school in FY13. The first phase of JGMC upgrades was funded this year but the amount was “small change.” Mr. Thomas said he believed the full amount spent on infrastructure was substantial and he wanted to make sure the value was being realized in efficiencies or other benefits.

Ms. McClung asked for a list of computer labs at BHS. Mr. Turkewitz enumerated them as Ms. Clements had before, adding the library work stations to the list. Most of the labs have about 25 computers; the library has a higher number. Ms. McClung asked whether the self-directed nature of technology could offset the class size problem. Ms. Clements replied that class time necessitates a certain amount of coordination around the material being covered so students and teacher should be in the same place at the same time.

Training teachers to be tech savvy enough to fix or program iPads, as Ms. McClung suggested, was seen by Ms. Clements as logistically unworkable since teachers have full class loads and are not normally available to address problems as they occur.

Ms. McClung expressed concern about the amount of screen time that additional computers in the classroom will mean at the elementary level. She also asked if Ipads were well-suited for the PARCC testing since, saying that typing numbers can be difficult. She asked about the quoted lifespan of 7 years for hardware. Mr. Turkewitz said that the lifespan of 7-10 years depends on the item. Planning for device or system component failure makes sense since something like a new switch can take a number of weeks to obtain and install. Meanwhile 48 computers have no connectivity. When things fall apart and are replaced with “something lesser” or handed down, it increases the chance that the item will fail.

Ms. McClung said that compromises will have to be made to accommodate PARCC within every school system, including stretching out the testing timeframe because there aren't enough computers for all students to take the tests at the same time.

Mr. Steele asked about the technician hire. When the Ipad program was first promoted, one of the touted benefits was that “the device was indestructible and would need less support.” Mr. Sills said that claim was well-intended but in error. He said that a lot of the breakage has been on the corners and screens when the students put them in their backpacks. The technician sends the broken iPad in to be fixed, backs up the info on the broken iPad, loads it on to a loaner, sets up the loaner with the apps related to the student's course load, sets up the student's email access, and then does the same when the original iPad is returned.

Ms. Clements said there are now 3 full-time technicians for the whole district who deal with issues wherever they occur. Typically, one tech is at the high school, one is at the middle school and one floats between Davis and Lane. The additional tech would add to the total number. Currently, the tech housed at the high school is absorbed by iPad issues. Other needs get backlogged.

Mr. Steele asked how the iPads are holding up. Mr. Sills said that the FY15 budget assumes some will need to be replaced. Ms. Clements said that the assumption is for 50 to be replaced and 50 added due to the increased student population. Mr. Steele said these replacement numbers will increase as the original iPads age. Mr. Coelho said there is \$50,000 allotted for the lease for 300 iPads.

Mr. Steele asked whether an iPad fee-for-use had been considered. Mr. Sills said it had not been discussed, adding it would be a significant change to Bedford's culture to levy a fee. Mr. Steele said that there will be "a point of no return" if budgets continue to go up higher than revenue.

Ms. Perry asked what happens when a student breaks a iPad? How is the student's work backed up? Mr. Turkewitz said that instructions have been provided to the students about how to set up their iPads so that their core note taking program automatically backs up the work to Dropbox. Despite the instructions, not all students set this up properly. If an iPad breaks, there are loaners. If the broken iPad is still usable at all, the tech can transfer the data to the loaner.

Ms. Perry echoed Ms. Clung's concern about screen time. Loss of time focused on the basics—reading and writing—would be a problem. Mr. Sills assured Ms. Perry that the basics are still emphasized.

Ms. Perry was concerned about money spent on infrastructure and hardware costs and its impact on capital expenditures. She believes the replacement cycle should be revisited annually and refined annually. In order to expand the capital budget, the operating budget would have to shrink. The money comes from the same sources. As the technology vision matures, the Schools need to keep close watch on the costs and expectations.

Mr. Bowen made observations about the technology curriculum, saying his impression was it was too much and too shallow. He added that the rationing of resources meant weighing teachers against technology investments and said he believed the State should help towns meet the requirements of PARCC testing.

Mr. Sills said that the technology presentation did not mean to suggest that every child needed to know absolutely everything on the admittedly long list. The list was meant to demonstrate the kinds of learning that could be done at each level; it was not specifically related to what the PARCC tests would cover.

Mr. Busa asked what the total number of computer devices is, system-wide. Mr. Turkewitz said that there are 850 PCs, 150 virtual desktops, 312 laptops, 29 Mac laptops, 1135 iPads and 94 "other" mobile devices. This includes all the technology for teachers, administrators, and office staff.

Mr. Busa asked if all the free apps are from Apple. Have "non-Apple" products been considered? Mr. Sills said the system is open to other options.

Mr. Sills said that Apple is the premier educational company but other companies are working hard to catch up. Incompatibility issues, however, will have to be watched. Mr. Turkewitz said that android options are not always available. Some apps are not education device-friendly. Ms. Clements said.

Mr. Steele said that non-Apple apps are not usable on Apple products.

Mr. Seibert asked what wireless gear would be purchased, saying that products have a lifespan and new versions might not work well with the system's hardware. Mr. Turkewitz said that so-far, backwards compatibility has not been an issue. Mr. Thomas cautioned that "throughput" could be affected and Mr. Turkewitz concurred.

Mr. Seibert asked about emulators for iPads. This has not been researched but Mr. Turkewitz said that Apple makes an emulator that's somewhat limited and is part of a development kit that must also be purchased and installed. Mr. Seibert said he is familiar with some emulators that would open up more options for program and hardware compatibility.

On the subject of work stations, Mr. Seibert asked whether the intent is for the number to remain constant. Mr. Turkewitz said he is not certain and that a number of elementary teachers—specifically at Lane— have asked for an increased number in their rooms. To accommodate those requests, some PCs have been handed down from other schools. The older PCs in the district tend to be at the elementary level. Sometimes teachers pool their PCs to create a mini-lab. Mr. Sills clarified that he does not see additional PCs in the classroom as a direction the system will take because mobile carts with handhelds will be purchased instead.

Mr. Steele asked if all the high school teachers have iPads, do they have desktops or laptops, too? Mr. Sills said the teachers do have desktops because they are needed to do the things handhelds can't. Ms. Clements said liberating desktops for student use is something she is looking into. Mr. Steele encouraged the Schools to find creative ways to meet the technology needs.

In response to a follow-up question from Mr. Thomas about the public access at the high school, Mr. Turkewitz said if the public access was turned off during the day, there would be connectivity problems. The public access does not take away from the building's bandwidth, he said. It uses the Comcast connection believed to be part of the Town's overall contract.

Sewer repair costs:

Mr. Garofalo said he didn't have the exact cost yet but it should "in the range of \$60,000 for the whole thing." The insurance company covers third party damage only: the pipe itself and the police details are part of Bedford's costs.

Model 2.6:

Mr. Garofalo said he has added the Schools' budget total to the department budget document. He is keeping a running tally of the budgets so far presented, with a tally (\$903,022) requested over the guideline. The Selectmen's departments are still to be presented on Feb 6.

The model has been updated in several ways. On the sewer line item, Mr. Garofalo increased the revenue in anticipation of higher rates intended to cover upcoming capital sewer projects.

Bonding projects that the Capital Expenditures Committee has presented to the Selectmen--although not yet approved— have been added to the model totaling \$ 1,521,600. This includes water projects and two dump trucks.

The snow deficit has been adjusted to \$300,000 as agreed at the last FinCom meeting. Mr. Garofalo will have the exact amount expended at the next meeting.

The other number that has changed is the Facilities number. The candidate to replace retired Director Richard Jones has been offered the job. A reallocation of \$900 of unspent merit money was put into the Facilities department column. This adjustment is due to changes in other Facilities department salaries, not because the new Director has been hired in at higher pay than the former Director. So, the difference of \$38,000 in merit for FY14 noted previously within the Town departments is now \$37,100.

In terms of the water purchase line item, the number has gone up for two reasons: an adjustment to water rates anticipated for next year and adjustments for anticipated flushing. More specifics will be presented on Feb 6 but it was noted that FinCom would be asked for a Reserve Fund transfer of about \$200,000 to cover the cost of this year's flushing associated with total coliform bacteria readings.

Mr. Garofalo noted changes to the Ambulance Account that will be presented next week. Mr. Thomas noted that the change is primarily the name and purpose of the account. He assured the Committee that the account is still intact.

New Business:

Mr. Steele asked when FinCom would be voting the budget. Mr. Garofalo said the vote would take place on Feb. 13 following the Community Preservation presentation.

Town Manager Reed said he would probably bring a DPW representative to talk about water flushing and someone from Youth and Family Services to talk about the Veteran's Affairs line item when he presents the Selectmen's budget next week.

Meetings attended:

Mr. Steele said that the last School Committee meeting included the announcement of the new Facilities Director. His background includes town management in Dedham and the MBTA. He will start on February 24.

Mr. Thomas said the Selectmen's meeting indicated the warrant articles are firming up.

Mr. Reed said that the Selectmen might make a request for \$6,000-\$7,000 for a position now being called "Healthy Community Coordinator." He added that the Selectmen's budget request would be within \$10,000 to \$12,000 of the original guideline except for veteran's benefits that is causing a \$50,000 overage. That money will be reimbursed later from the State but still needs to be addressed.

Minutes:

After revision, the minutes of January 23 were approved on a motion by Ms. Perry and seconded by Mr. Steele. 7-0-1

Adjournment:

The meeting was adjourned on a motion from Mr. Busa that was seconded by Mr. Steele. 8-0-0

Respectfully submitted,
Kim Siebert, FinCom Recording Secretary

