

Name of Committee: Override Study Committee Populations and SPED Task Force

Meeting Date: March 6, 2014 Time: 5:00 p.m.

Meeting Location: Town Hall – Room 408

Members Present: Cliff Brown, Janet Gelbart, Carol Kamin, Lee Selwyn

Others Present: Alan Morse, Lisa Paradis, Amy Clim, John Doggett, Rebecca Stone, Susan Wolf Ditkoff

Topic: Continued discussion of and potential votes on topics including, but not limited to, early education, Soule Recreation Center, extended day, materials fee, Metco, facilities use, and Baldwin facility

Cliff reviewed the early education fees charged in various Brookline town and private programs. It is important to look at full day instead of hourly fees to get a better understanding of comparable costs. Private programs seem to ramp down their rates for extended hours, covering more of their fixed costs during the morning half-day programs. BEEP does not do this, resulting in lower than average fees for the morning program, but higher than average fees for children who go full-time (5-days, 8 a.m. to 5:45 p.m.). The analysis is based on 2013-14 rates because programs are in the process of changing their published rates for the next school year.

Selection of early education programs is made on a number of variables including hours, cost, quality, location, and nature of the program. The group voted unanimously to adopt the following recommendation:

“Pricing for BEEP should be increased at a rate of 10% per annum until such time as they equal or exceed the average, on a per hour basis in the market for programs of similar duration, nature, quality and location (excluding Brookline schools and the Apple Orchard). Pricing tiers for BEEP and its extended day options should reflect overall market conditions as well.”

Cliff indicated he had asked for a formal legal opinion from Town Counsel to determine whether the Soule facility can be used for something other than recreational purposes. The warrant article references the land, but other documentation refers to the land and buildings. Recreation runs an early education school at Soule. Can the school department operate an early education program there instead? In December, we had looked at having BEEP take over the space at Soule and Baldwin to eliminate the need for outside space. Alternatively, we looked at the Recreation Department’s fee schedule in terms of market. Susan Wolf Ditkoff indicated that if the Hancock Village proposal goes forward , the property might be needed for a school.

Lisa Paradis joined the discussion to answer specific questions about the Soule program. There are multiple registration options which include a variable number of days (3, 4, or 5) and hours (8-12:30, 8-4, 8-6). The rates are the same for all sessions. Highest demand is for 8-12:30 and 8-4. There are programs for toddlers (12 mos. to 3 years) as well as pre-K. There are 4 masters level and 3 bachelors level certified teachers in addition to a masters level director. Staff ratios and qualifications are similar to BEEP.

Parents choose Soule over Beep because of location, access to recreation programs, the small, family-oriented feel, and a preference for a non-inclusionary environment. Price is also a factor. Six families (10 children) currently receive financial aid. In FY 15, financial aid will be capped for each cost center as a percentage of revolving fund balance weighted by cost center. The purpose of the cap is to make it a fixed cost each year. Less financial aid will be available

Teachers at Soule are not part of the teacher's union and their salaries are much lower (36-38K for 40 hours). The program is in a hybrid Montessori Reggio Emilia model. It takes only Brookline residents. The current wait list is 350 slots. Siblings get preferential enrollment, but after that, it is first come, first serve with some attention to gender and age balance.

Cost recovery for Soule is at 110% of direct costs. The goal is 85% of full cost recovery (direct and indirect) in FY 15. The plan is to increase fees by 20% per year over the next three years so that the Soule program is at full cost recovery.

Cliff asked if the basement at Soule could be converted to another classroom instead of being used for storage. The area is not a good one, as it has no windows and is difficult to keep dry. Renovations would be expensive

There are two options for the subcommittee to consider:

- potential to increase Soule fees more than 100% of direct and indirect program costs to contribute more toward full cost recovery of the Recreation Revolving fund as a whole
- if legally acceptable, shift use of the space to the school department and expand the BEEP program which would bring in greater revenue

The meeting adjourned at 7:00.