

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

Meeting Date: March 13, 2014 Time: 5:00 p.m.

Meeting Location: Town Hall – Room 310

Members Present: Cliff Brown, Janet Gelbart, Michael Glover, Lee Selwyn

Others Present: Susan Wolf Ditkoff

Topic: Approval of minutes

Approval of the minutes from the March 6 meeting was deferred due a lack of a quorum of the participants of that meeting.

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 Brown indicated that the Committee had reached consensus on full day kindergarten and BEEP at its last meeting, and moved on to discussing the issues regarding Soule. Current Soule fees are well below the market. The Recreation Department plans to raise fees by 20% per year for the next three years to achieve full cost recovery (Soule direct costs plus Soule's pro-rated share of the subsidy the department receives from the Town). The end result is still below market and comparable fees at BEEP. Janet Gelbart explained that because there is only one revolving fund for the Recreation Department, there is a potential for loading more of the Town subsidy onto the Soule program than a pro-rated share. There is no desire to price people out of the market. Lee Selwyn suggested raising fees faster for incoming children and grandfathering the rates for families currently enrolled.

Cliff raised the issue of combining the Soule and BEEP programs. He has asked Town Counsel for a legal opinion regarding the use of the Soule property which is currently restricted to recreational use. Is an early education program recreational just because of who runs it? In addition to the legal issues, considerations include the cost of services (BEEP is a more expensive model because of the special education requirements and the higher salaries teachers receive), trade-off between higher fees BEEP could charge and the loss of additional cost recovery options on the Town side, the programmatic impact of combining the programs, and the transition costs. Having an education program under the auspices of the Recreation Department creates questions about mission. Soule serves infants and toddlers, and they could potentially be moved to the Baldwin site which houses a day care and early education program run by teachers for their children.

Cliff reported that charging rent at \$25K per site for the extended day programs would result in a 3%-5.5% per year increase in tuition, depending on the site. The impact per family would be approximately \$18 per month per child, or \$180 per year.

Lee indicated it was the committee's responsibility to develop scenarios that correspond to the work being done by the Capital subcommittee. The variables are reducing or suspending further entry into the METCO and Materials Fee programs and increasing class size. Sergio Modigliani has calculated annual debt service of approximately \$7K per student; Beth Jackson Stram's model was at \$8K-\$9K in operating costs per student. Lee's long-range cost projection is at approximately \$16K per student which is in the same ballpark. The options range from doing nothing (high end cost) and assuming no override (cuts to services). The School and Capital committees need to work together to generate options in between.

Cliff discussed the presentation he was preparing for the full OSC. He wanted to keep things at a high level and discuss METCO and Materials fee last. The intent is to have a factual discussion of demographics and dollar impact, leaving the values issues off the table at this time.

Lee said that according to Dick Benka, approximately half of the METCO children in Brookline schools come from middle class families. At the same time, the number of poorer families in Brookline is increasing. There are no stats relating to the success of the METCO program on their website. Cliff indicated that METCO is not about income diversity, and that METCO now admits children to reflect the racial composition of Boston public schools. Lee questioned whether we were subsidizing middle income non-resident families at the expense of lower income residents. The task force thought it would be helpful to invite METCO to meet with the group to gain a better understanding of these issues.

The meeting adjourned at 6:55 p.m.