

**CITY OF WOBURN
CITY COUNCIL
COMMITTEE ON FINANCE
As a Committee of the Whole
THURSDAY, JUNE 6, 2024, at 6:00 p.m.
CITY COUNCIL CHAMBERS
WOBURN CITY HALL**

Voting Members present: Chair Charles Viola, Councilor Joseph Demers, Councilor Robert Ferullo, Councilor Joanne Campbell, President Jeffrey Dillon, Councilor Robert Toro, Councilor William Pappalardo, Councilor Lou DiMambro, and Councilor Darlene Mercer-Bruen

Also present: Mayor Michael Concannon

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Discussion of the FY 2025 Budget: Northeast Metropolitan Regional Vocational School – Representing the Northeast Metropolitan Regional Vocation School were Supt. David DiBarri, Finance Director James Picone and Asst. Supt. Tracey O’Brien. Supt. DiBarri said things are a little different this year. He said usually the officials from Northeast Voke come and tell the committee how they were able to keep the city’s assessment to the district as low as possible. He said this year the state played a little shell game and the district was forced to increase spending. He said they did try to keep the assessment as low as possible. He said they are working to make sure this is a one-year anomaly. He said he wants to introduce Asst. Supt. O’Brien, who he said is a Woburn High graduate. Asst. Supt. O’Brien said she is a Woburn High grad. She said she has been at Northeast Voke for 18 years. She said there are 172 students from Woburn at Northeast Voke. She said applications have risen over the past 10 years and enrollment is now at 1,200. She said the new building project is set to start in July with the arrival of steel. She said they hope the new building will open in the spring of 2026. She said there has been an increase in state funding and \$23 million of returned funds were devoted to the reduction of costs. She said the district also secured \$7 million in capital funds to lower the cost of the project. She said Northeast Voke students participate in community-based projects at locations like the Joyce Middle School and the Woburn Boys & Girls Club. Director Picone said the administration’s goal is to minimize the budgetary impact to the member communities. He said the district is under the restriction of Proposition 2 ½. He said they are very cognizant of that as they try to provide an adequate level of education. He said they try to keep the annual assessment at or below 3 percent. He said there are reasons why they were unable to achieve that benchmark this year. He said there was a decrease in Chapter 90 money. He said they anticipated a lot more money than they received. He said they expected \$2.2 million and got \$1 million. He said there is a required minimum contribution and the gap is usually filled by state funding. He said they are also entering the third year of the building project. He said the interest and principal are at their highest in FY ’25 and FY ’26. He said it is the perfect storm of costs. He said they were able to borrow at a rate of 4.7 percent, which he said is a great rate. He said that should offset the debt service of the project by \$60 million. Supt. DiBarri said inflation is also a factor. He said inflation is not a little over 1 percent, which goes back to the shell game at the state level. Director Picone said the district also received an 80 percent transportation reimbursement that will be used to reduce costs by \$1.7 million. He said all told the debt service increase is

\$5,432,667. He said without the debt service, the increase would be about 6 percent. Supt. DiBarri said some communities pay a lot more for students, but everyone pays the same debt service. Motion made by Councilor Demers and seconded by Councilor Demers to receive and make part of the permanent record documents entitled “Northeast Metropolitan Regional Vocational School FY 2025 Approved by School Committee April 11, 2024;” and “Northeast Metropolitan Regional Vocational School FY 25 Budget Presentation to Woburn City Council June 6, 2024;” approved, 9-0. Councilor Demers said he is glad the debt service works more like a regular formula than the student assessment. He said it appears there will be two additional students from Woburn with a \$420,000 increase in the assessment. He said the funding component is a problem. He said this has been going on since at least 2009. He asked if there is any interest in looking at revising the funding formula. Supt. DiBarri said the governor’s office moved money to fund other priorities. He said this did get some press. He said he was shocked it wasn’t headline news. He said why people stayed quiet about it is worrisome. He said the administration felt it wasn’t the right thing to do. Councilor Demers asked if Northeast Voke is allowed to have a rainy-day fund. Supt. DiBarri said they are allowed to have a rainy-day fund of up to 5 percent of the total budget. He said they have been shutting off lights when they are not needed and any other cost-saving measures available. President Dillon asked what Woburn’s cost per pupil is. Director Picone said the cost per pupil is \$23,067. President Dillon said it is very difficult to find technicians. He told Northeast Voke to keep up the good work. He said people don’t realize when your plumbing doesn’t work, you’re not going to be able to call an accountant. Councilor Toro asked how the enrolled number of students from Woburn is determined. Asst. Supt. O’Brien said the school charter sets the formula. She said it is based on overall high school enrollment for the entire district. She said any surplus seats are divided among the rest of the district. She said there is only one town in the district that doesn’t use all its seats. Councilor Toro said it looks like Woburn pays the second highest per pupil costs in the district and asked if Woburn has the second highest number of seats. He said he would love to see the standards for each community. Director Picone said the required minimum contribution involves income and property values for each community, and the state has apparently decided Woburn is the second wealthiest community in the district. Supt. DiBarri said the formula is hard to understand, never mind explain. He said at the end of the day they get the same amount of money for each student, and the variable is how much the state is willing to kick in. Councilor Toro asked if tuition is set by the state and not the school. Supt. DiBarri said that is correct. He said the formula goes back to education reform and it is frustrating. Councilor Toro said he would love to see a breakdown by city and town. Councilor Campbell thanked the Northeast Voke administrators for all they do. She said Northeast Voke plays a very important role. She said the administration has been very frugal over the years. She said when she sees this financial situation has happened, she believes them. She said she believes this increase is coming from the state. She said it is very sad. She said people do not understand the budgetary ramifications. She said the governor may have to re-think the programs she is choosing to fund, because it is putting the schools in a deficit. Councilor DiMambro asked how construction costs for the new school are being managed. He said the cost of building materials is going up about every quarter it seems. Supt. DiBarri said the new school building is 100 percent on budget and on schedule. He said he plans on the project being under budget, even if it is under one cent. He said they are refunding \$23 million to minimize debt. He said he wouldn’t do that if he wasn’t sure the new school would be on budget. He said they are at the State House constantly because they can get money for the district. He said they have been successful. Councilor DiMambro thanked the

administrators for their diligence. He said he wants to thank the Northeast Voke students that built the speaking podium at the O'Brien Rink. Councilor Mercer-Bruen said she knows the school building project will come in under budget. She said she knows the district wastes nothing. She said she is excited the new building is going to be built so quickly. She said the school provides a service to Woburn and the other member communities. She said she knows Northeast Voke students are prepared to go to college. She said the vocational school dynamic has changed so much over the years. She told the Northeast Voke administrators to keep doing what they are doing. **Woburn Public Schools** – Representing the School Dept. were School Committee Chair Andrew Lipsett and Supt. Dr. Matthew Crowley. Mayor Concannon said this is the third night of the City Council's budget review session. He said the first two nights focused on the city side of the budget and tonight the focus is on the schools. He said he appreciates the attention that's been paid so far. He said he appreciates the support. He said he thinks everyone has a copy of the update recap sheet that has been provided by the City Auditor. Motion made by Councilor Demers to accept and make part of the permanent record an updated budget recap sheet; approved, 9-0. Mayor Concannon said the only change is on page 30 of the budget. He said there have been discussions about partial offense savings that have been built into the budget due to 1.) redistricting; 2.) early retirement incentives; and 3.) reimbursement from the state for newly arrived migrants. He said since May 23 the city has learned a few things. He said the School Committee has voted to no longer proceed with redistricting this year. He said at one point there appeared there would be a savings of \$375,000, which he included in an earlier draft. He said the School Committee has made a decision and circumstances have changed. He said the next step was the early retirement incentive, which he said would have come about as a result of redistricting. He said by moving students around there was a potential savings because the school district would not need as many teachers. He said what is before the City Council is a budget that puts back \$750,000 from the removal of the early retirement incentive. He said the third basket is the projected reimbursement for migrant programs. He said none of us knows the number. He said they are using a model similar to what they use for other educational items. He said he can tell the council this is what the School Committee voted for as its budget in FY '25. He said that number was built over several months of discussion with the School Dept., the School Committee Chair, the City Council President and the City Auditor. He said he has seen the details of the School Dept. budget and he has presented what he feels is an adequate number. He said the councilors may ask why there is such a big increase. He said if one looks at the back page there is a breakdown of significant budget drivers. He said if you take last year's budget and add mandatory costs, you get the number before you tonight. He said contracts need to be included. He said there is \$1.7 million in ESSR funds that has dried up. He said out-of-district special education costs are increasing, and the cost of special education transportation is increasing. He said electricity and the cost of maintenance is increasing. He said this is a fully funded budget. He said it is a lot of money. He said there will be an impact to taxpayers. He said he got lessons on how the school budget is compiled and funded. He said it was helpful. He said he is asking the City Council to bless that cooperative effort. He said the administration got a better idea of what the School Dept. needs during budget meetings. He said he would ask representatives from the School Dept. to continue to sit with the administration during monthly meetings. He said if there are any questions, he will be happy to answer them. President Dillon asked for the public in the audience and watching at home for the exact number of the School Dept. budget. Mayor Concannon said the proposed number is \$90,366,621.40. President Dillon asked the mayor to explain WuStat. Mayor Concannon said WuStat involves the frequent review

of the ongoing status of financial data. He said city officials meet under the WuStat banner once a month. He said representatives from the police department, fire department, DPW and others look at the budget. He said they look to see where they should be tracking and whether projections are accurate. President Dillon asked if there have been positive results with WuStat. Mayor Concannon said WuStat has led department heads to make clearer, more valid arguments for what they need. He said Fire Chief Kenton learned he was spending too much on overtime and he requested to add personnel. Councilor Ferullo asked Mayor Concannon to explain the administration of WuStat. Mayor Concannon said the city has a contract with an outside agency. He said he has found the information in WuStat to be extremely helpful. Councilor Mercer-Bruen asked if the School Dept. has agreed to being involved with WuStat. Mayor Concannon said in principle the School Dept. would agree to meeting frequently. Councilor Mercer-Bruen asked if WuStat shows how money gets transferred from one place to another. Mayor Concannon answered affirmatively. Councilor Mercer-Bruen said this is a big number. She said a lot of it is contractual, and some of it isn't. She said she has concerns about how this number is going to impact the city's most vulnerable population. Mayor Concannon said he shares that concern. Councilor Mercer-Bruen said maybe there is an opportunity to find some savings and alleviate this pain. She said everyone is going to have to make a decision on Monday. She said she is looking forward to getting into the details of it. Mayor Concannon said there is a process by which the budget gets approved. He said this is the City Council's part. He said that has to be respected. Chair Lipsett said school officials are here to present the FY '25 budget. He said this is a large budget. He said it is a historic budget. He said the city is in a historic moment. He said the School Committee has had to meet contractual obligations as well as a rapidly growing increase in student population. He said there has been an 8 percent increase in school population since school started. He said the School Dept. has to meet the needs of the students. He said the students that are being added are high needs students. He said when this process started, the School Dept. wanted to make a transparent budget. He said this is the most transparent budget the schools have ever presented. He said school officials have been under a lot of pressure. He said there have been a lot of variables and schools officials do not have a lot of clarity about the budget even though it is early June. He said they want to be able to hire. He asked the council to look at the budget beyond politics and think about what the students require. He said there will be a tax increase. He said the School Committee is required to look out for the students. He said this budget represents their needs. Supt. Crowley said this is the seventh time he has presented a budget. He said he is nervous because the number is so high. He said the School Dept.'s budgetary process began in January. He said there is a new Director of Finance & Operations in Alex Dizio. He said Director Dizio has been doing a great job since he was hired in late fall. He said the school administration gets feedback from teachers, carrying that to principals and ultimately to the administration. He said they are trying to be as transparent as possible. He said Woburn has changed drastically over his time as superintendent. He said they have enrolled 500 new students. He said they have also lost some to other communities. He said the class rosters in September look nothing like they do now. He said one of his proudest moments was in late August. He said they set up enrollment centers and enrolled more than 70 new migrant students. He said the kids are great. He said they went to the Comfort Inn to enroll new students. He said the School Dept. is providing counseling at the Malcolm White School. He said they would like to expand that, but there is a major cost due to transportation. He said Chair Lipsett alluded to high needs students. He said 25 percent of the students are in special education. He said that is a lot different than it was even a few years ago. He said 15 percent are EL students. He said a

couple of years ago it was 5 percent. He said the change for the teachers is real. He said the other component is economic disadvantage. He said in 2020, the percentage of the high needs students was 45.4. He said in 2024, the percentage of high needs students is 56.3. He said that's challenging for the staff. He said reading specialists have been added, and they need to be maintained, citing an example of a budgetary increase. He said he was very pleased to hear Mayor Concannon's remarks. He said the mayor said a lot of what he wanted to say. He said if you've seen the school budget, you know what the drivers are. He said all staff members are great. He said Woburn has a great community of people helping the kids. Councilor Toro said he has followed the budget process pretty closely. He thanked the school officials for their effort. He said it is clear the administration spent a lot of time on this budget. He said everyone knows it is going to have an impact on residents. He said it seems like the majority of money is for DESE mandates, rising costs, and contractual agreements. He said this budget does not factor in any wish list items. He said it addresses the needs of the students. He said investing in the schools is an investment in the community. He said he understands making cuts to the budget will impact the schools much more negatively than the bottom line. He said cutting \$1 million will result in a small decrease in the tax rate but it will have a big impact on the schools. Chair Lipsett acknowledged there have been inflationary pressures. He said state funding has not increased at the same rate as the needs of the students. He said many more students are in crisis. He said the reasons are varied. He said schools are often the first place for refuge when socioeconomic pressures hit. He said they offer kids help to get them through. Councilor Toro said he knows there has been a lot of time spent on this budget. He asked if there is anything that can be cut to save the taxpayer money. Supt. Crowley said there is not. Councilor Toro asked if the money for migrants identified in the budget was already baked into the budget or if it is a reimbursement. Supt. Crowley said that money is expected to arrive by the start of the next school year. Councilor Toro said he does not think it would be fair to bake that money into the budget. Supt. Crowley said the money should be used to support newly arrived students. He said the Sonesta hotel houses students for whom they run buses to four different schools. Councilor Toro said as a Councilor at-large he has gotten a lot of feedback from many constituents. He said one of the main questions is what is going to prevent another 14 percent increase in the budget next year. He said it's a little easier to take if the it's a 1-time increase. Supt. Crowley said schools can't run on a 3 percent budget every year. He said ESSR money has gone away, and he does not know what the percentage next year will be. He said 14 percent is unprecedented. He said he does not want or intend to advocate for a number. He said his job is to advocate for students. He said he respects other departments, but he's not doing his job unless he's advocating for his kids. Chair Lipsett said if the school department sees an external increase, it is something they have to respond to. He said this is not the budget they wanted to present. Supt. Crowley said this budget had 48 additional asks. He said the Facilities Dept. asked for an assistant director. He said there is one payroll clerk and a district Woburn's size should have two or three. He said the budget is pretty lean in a lot of areas. He said the district does not have a lot of depth. Councilor Toro said he is inclined to support the mayor's budget. He acknowledged it's a big number. He said the council is going to have to have conversations about how the city is going to shield its most vulnerable taxpayers. He said he would like to see the School Committee more involved in a collaborative approach. He said he would like to see the School Department become part of the WuStat program. He said he thinks there needs to be a more consistently open line of communication. President Dillon asked what percentage increase in the budget the schools are looking for. Supt. Crowley said the percentage increase is 14.53 percent. Mr. Dizio said the

budget figure for the schools is \$90,366,621.40. President Dillon asked Supt. Crowley to confirm the budget is not increasing 14 percent because of the influx of migrants. Supt. Crowley said that is correct: The budget is not increasing 14 percent solely because of the influx of migrants. President Dillon said it is important to clarify that. President Dillon said he totally believes Woburn is still a blue-collar city. He said his father was a custodian at the high school and his mother stayed home. He said he couldn't have had a better life. He said he knows what it is like to struggle to maintain a budget. He said this tax increase will hurt. He said he worries about that. He said renters will see property tax increases passed along to them. He said the council does not take that lightly. He said the city needs to get this right so they don't have to go through the same thing next year. He asked how much of the 14 percent increase is due to contractual obligations. Mr. Dizio asked if President Dillon is referring to the raises just for the teachers. President Dillon answered affirmatively. Mr. Dizio said he does not know that number off-hand. He said he would have to go line item by line item to make that determination. President Dillon asked if it is safe to say it is a substantial increase. Mr. Dizio answered affirmatively. Supt. Crowley said 76 percent of the school budget is devoted to salaries. He said the increase in salaries this year is \$5 million. Councilor Demers said he sat through the budget process six times as a School Committee member. He said each of those years the budget probably increased 3-5 percent. He said the chickens are coming home to roost now. He said he takes great pride in the schools. He said he sees dedicated staff. He said the school budget is more volatile than a NASA rocket right now. He said he would like to address a few line items so he has a better understanding of why they increased. He asked why the line item for substitute teachers increased from \$550,000 to \$800,000. Supt. Crowley said the daily rate for substitutes was increased from \$90 to \$125 per day during the Covid period. He said they also used ESSR money. He said they have also had more staff out. He said they looked at a 3-year average and budgeted the right number. Councilor Demers said the line item for the Curriculum Dept. has increased from \$150,000 to \$396,000 and asked why. Supt. Crowley said the district is looking to implement high quality instruction materials to replace outdated materials. He said there is also money in that line item for professional development. Councilor Demers said there are 140 paraprofessionals and asked how many work on a 1:1 ratio with students. He said the administration can get back to him with that number. Asst. Supt. of Student Services Maureen Ryan said the majority of paraprofessionals work on a 2:1 ratio. She said a small percentage of paraprofessionals work in resource rooms. Councilor Demers said he thinks the Curriculum Coordinator position is a great add. He said he wants to caution his colleagues that any type of cut would impact an important addition to the school district. He requested a list of 48 additional asks to which Supt. Crowley referred. He said the council saw sticker shock when it saw this budget. He said he thinks knowing what the plan is will help the council better support the school budget. He said one of the things folks are in is a silo. He said people tend to only look at schools when they were in school or when their kids were in school. He said he does not see a lot of waste or cuts that would make a considerable impact on the taxpayers. He said he is not going to suggest cuts that will save someone \$25. He said he is not going to do that to the students. He said education is a moral responsibility. He said schools are more like social services centers now. He asked if the School Dept. charges bus fees. Supt. Crowley said there are no bus fees. Councilor Demers asked if there are athletic fees. Supt. Crowley said there are no athletic fees. Councilor Demers asked if there are activities fees. Supt. Crowley said there are no activities fees. Councilor Demers asked if there are technology fees. Supt. Crowley said there are no technology fees. Councilor Demers asked if everyone gets a lunch who needs one. Supt. Crowley

answered affirmatively. Councilor Pappalardo said this is an extraordinary situation and the School Dept. is asking for an extraordinary amount of money. He said when you look at the economy, it is an awful lot the city is asking from the taxpayers. He said there are residents who are going to have significant issues coming up with the extra amount. He said the anticipated tax increase is \$600-\$800 on the average house. He said he understands the School Dept.'s job is to give students the best education. He said the School Dept. has to look at this differently than the council does. He said the council needs to look at the budget through two different lenses. He said the proposed increase to the budget goes beyond what he can confidently support. He said he feels like the budget needs to be reduced. Supt. Crowley said he hears what Councilor Pappalardo is saying. He said one of the things he wants to highlight is the operational side of running a school district. He said they have to let the staff know by June 15 that they have a job. He said they will have three days after the budget passes to let staff know whether they have a job. Councilor Pappalardo said the biggest issue isn't teachers. He said there are a lot of positions which he is not sure are needed. Councilor Mercer-Bruen said nobody on the council takes this lightly. She said she does not think she has slept one full night since the budget was presented. She said she has been in this seat for 18 years and she has never thought once about not supporting a school budget. She said she does not know if she can support the school budget this year at this number, however. She said the same people they are trying to help are going to be impacted by a tax increase that could conceivably leave them homeless. She said there are a lot of people who are not going to be able to absorb the tax increase that will result by the passage of this budget, including senior citizens. She said she is struggling with this budget. She said the raises the teachers got are long overdue. She said there has to be some way to find some savings. She said the city-side is all level funded. She said she can't think of one position that could be eliminated. She said if there is anything the school district can do, then please, please do it for the residents of the city. Supt. Crowley said he appreciates Councilor Mercer-Bruen's conflict. Councilor Mercer-Bruen said she is worried about her constituency and how this increase in the budget is going to hurt them. She said she is mostly concerned about people being pushed out of their homes. Supt. Crowley said his concern is it is June 6 and the Council is going to vote on a budget number on June 10. He said the budget was submitted on May 14 and since then it has been completely frozen. He said his concern is the staff and the kids. Councilor DiMambro said he is struggling with a 14.3 percent increase. He said he has read all the line items. He said he talks to all the department heads. He said the services they provide are incredible. He said they do a lot. He said he also sees a lot of senior citizens at the Senior Center. He said then he sees the next generation coming through the schools. He said he knows it was difficult for the students to come through the Covid period. He said he goes to School Committee meetings and he listens to the teachers. He said he listens to them struggle. He said this is a historical budget. He said he strongly recommends the School Dept. participate in WuStat. He said let's try to do it for FY '26. He said he is not sure how this is going to pan out for a vote. He said he is struggling with it. He said he sees people who are on fixed incomes. He said the city needs to give kids the best education they can possibly get. He said he appreciates everyone's hard work. Chair Lipsett said the School Committee has struggled with this budget as well. He said it is not a budget the members wanted to present. He said this is the budget the students need. He said he wants students to receive the kind of education they can be proud of. He said his house has 1,400-square-feet. He said his wife and he are going to feel this. He said he realizes the impact of a tax increase. He said Woburn has increased its taxes, but it's lower compared to other communities. He said the city has fallen behind its basic obligation. He said he can't speak for Police, Fire or

DPW, but he does not see them in competition. Councilor DiMambro said he wants people to understand that Woburn has been bringing in commercial and industrial uses to offset these costs. He said traffic is a juggernaut. He said Woburn is a very complex, very diverse community. He said it is very important to that the system is balanced. He said The Vale was supposed to have commercial buildings, but they left due to high interest rates. He said the council is desperately trying to offset the burden of costs to residents. He said it is like a perfect storm. He said the council is going to have to find a number that works for everyone. Chair Lipsett said as far as WuStat is concerned the School Dept. and the School Committee work on a different level. He said the School Committee is bound by law to be the overseer of the budget. He said they hold meetings in public. He said they go through the budget line by line. He said what he does not want is the impression the School Committee does not undergo a thorough and transparent examination of the school budget. Councilor DiMambro said WuStat is a tool that is in the drawer. He said if WuStat is something the School Dept. can utilize, then that's something they should look at. He said they want hard data that can be analyzed. He suggested the School Dept. get on board with WuStat tomorrow. Councilor Campbell said budget increases have been very low for the past 10 years. She said what she is hearing is mandates from the state are crippling the school system. She said the state is not considering what the students need. She said the state is not understanding the financial burden. She said the cost is exorbitant. She said when she looks at 56.3 percent of the student population having high needs, there are a lot of different reasons. She said Covid was a part of it. She asked what teachers do when 15 percent of the student population does not speak English. She said her hope is the city can look into tax rebates for senior citizens to help them through this increase. She said she has spoken to a lot of people who are living paycheck to paycheck. She said she would also like to look at using some free cash to help offset the tax increases. She said she does not know all the ramifications. She said maybe the tax rate will not be so extravagant. She said that is her hope. She said maybe surplus funds can be used. She said if it's a rainy-day fund, she thinks it's a rainy day when taxes may increase by \$600-\$800. Councilor Mercer-Bruen said she would like to say to Councilor Campbell that using free cash is one of the worst ways to fiscally manage anything. She said the city wants to protect its AAA bond rating, especially in an environment where interest rates are rising. She said the city needs to think outside the box. She said nobody wants anyone to lose their job. She said the city can't invest in everything all at once. She said the city can only do so much. She said she knows this process has been difficult. She said she is a little disappointed to hear the response to WuStat. She said she thinks it would be helpful if WuStat was on the table. Councilor Ferullo said WuStat is not necessarily a budgetary tool. He said it is a program that started at UMass. He said he was a guinea pig for the first seven years of his tenure at Police Chief. He said it is not a numbers thing. He said it is about efficiency. He said he is scared to death of the dollar figures the School Dept. is talking about. He said he still spends a lot of time in the schools. He asked if migrant students move to another community, does their former community still have to transport them to the former community's school system. Supt. Crowley said this has actually happened in Woburn. He said 12 families moved from the Comfort Inn to Danvers. He said those families had the right to keep attending schools in Woburn and Woburn would split the cost with Danvers. He said he talked about the homeless transportation line item of \$450,000. He said the school system transports students from all over the state. He said those kids have that right. He said all 12 kids are now attending Danvers schools. Councilor Ferullo asked if those students can come back to Woburn next year. Supt. Crowley said once the students enroll in Danvers, they're in Danvers. He said they can't come

back. Councilor Ferullo said he is concerned about next year. He said there are other people worried it's going to put the city in the same predicament. Chair Lipsett said he is scared about the prospect of the money not being there, and what that does to the staff and the students. He said there are no hidden savings in this budget. He said he would not want to be sitting in a City Councilor's chair. He said there are no easy answers. He said reducing this budget is not going to be easy. Councilor Ferullo said the growth at the end of Commerce Way will impact the school system. He said it will also impact police and fire services. He said police staffing is the same as it was in the 1980s when he was sworn in as an officer. He asked how many housing units are under contract now. Councilor Mercer-Bruen replied about 1,500 units. President Dillon thanked Councilor Campbell for thinking outside the box about free cash. He said he is hesitant to endorse that method because of the impact on interest rates. He said that is what a rainy-day fund is for, such as issues like PFAS. Councilor DiMambro said the population in Ward 6 is going to go up in a few years. He said the city still has to look at the Altavesta and Linscott schools. He said the residents of North Woburn still want a new elementary school. He said those two schools are in tough shape. He said the Kennedy and Joyce middle schools are going to have to be considered at some point. Chair Lipsett said the budget in front of the City Council is a result of a diligent process. He said that diligence started before this budget came to the council. He said the School Committee has spent a ton of time on this budget. He said he thinks there is going to be an increase in the city's population in North Woburn and acknowledged there will be implications to those schools. Councilor Campbell said she understands the ramifications of using free cash. She said she is not talking about covering the entire budget increase. She said she is talking about using \$3 million-\$4 million. She said free cash is somewhere between \$20 million-\$40 million. She said she understands the bond rating dynamic. She said if there is a way to use \$3 million-\$4 million in free cash to take the edge off, that would really help. Chair Viola said this is the highest budget anyone in the city has ever seen. He said he understands the needs of the school system are very high. He said senior citizens are vulnerable and they are going to take a hit. He said the city needs to provide the best education it can while keeping taxes affordable. He said it might be a good idea to consider bringing facilities onto the city side of the budget. He said WuStat is definitely a great idea. He said the estimated tax increase will be \$600-\$800. He said he will keep an open mind when the City Council debates the budget on Monday night. Supt. Crowley thanked the City Council for its time. He said he also wants to let the Councilors know that after Mayor Concannon was sworn in in January he toured the schools and he kept saying 'I wish everybody could see what I see.' He said the needs of the students are real and the teachers are awesome but they need support. He said the School Dept. is open-minded about WuStat. He said if there is a way to do things better, he is interested in learning. He said he does believe in transparency with the public. Chair Viola thanked the school officials including members of the School Committee for attending tonight's meeting.

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MOTION made by Councilor Demers and seconded by Councilor Ferullo to adjourn; all in favor, 9-0. Chair Viola adjourned the meeting at 8:53 p.m.

A TRUE RECORD ATTEST

Gordon Vincent

Clerk of Committees