

**CITY OF WOBURN
CITY COUNCIL
COMMITTEE ON FINANCE
As a Committee of the Whole
CITY COUNCIL CHAMBERS
WOBURN CITY HALL
TUESDAY, MAY 27, 2025, at 6 p.m.**

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

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Reading and approval of minutes from meeting of May 12, 2025: Motion made by Councilor Demers and seconded by Councilor Ferullo to waive the reading of and approve the minutes of the Finance Committee meeting of May 12, 2025; all in favor, 3-0.

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Discussion of the FY '26 municipal budget with the following departments: Mayor – Representing the Mayor's office was Mayor Michael Concannon. Mayor Concannon said he is joined tonight by City Auditor Charles Doherty and representatives from the city's Planning, Veterans Services and School departments. He said as the committee saw from his introductory letter when he presented the budget this will be a maintenance year. He said he thinks the committee will hear that from department heads. He said many of the departmental increases are limited to contractual salary raises that were previously negotiated. He said the Substance Misuse Coordinator's position is being funded by an opioid settlement. He said there is one union contract that is still outstanding. He said he hopes the city and that union will wrap up negotiations this year. He said there are some line item adjustments for inflation. He said notably there is a reduction in the line item for NuPath services. He said he feels NuPath can absorb that reduction. He said that is the extent of the mayor's office's presentation. Councilor Demers asked Mayor Concannon to elaborate on the line item for consultants. Mayor Concannon said the Planning and Engineering departments and the mayor's office rely on analysts. He said they do try to seek grant funding. He said there is also an efficiency consultant. Councilor Mercer-Bruen asked if it would be too much trouble to send to the committee a plan that shows how the consulting funds are used. Mayor Concannon said he can do that. He said there are items like the Housing Production Plan that require the use of consultants. Councilor Pappalardo asked when the grant that funds the Substance Misuse Coordinator expires. Mayor Concannon said the money to fund that position is from a national opioid settlement and will not run out for several years to come. Councilor Demers asked if the Substance Misuse Coordinator can make a presentation to the council. Mayor Concannon said she would be eager to do so. Councilor Demers asked President Dillon if he can set that up in the context of a Liaison Committee meeting. **Veterans Affairs –** Representing the Office of Veterans Affairs was Robert Davis, Director of Veterans Affairs. Director Davis said his FY '26 budget is level-funded in terms of maintenance. He said the department is in pretty good shape. He said the only item that has increased is flags. He said the cost of flags continues to go up. He said those expenses are

reimbursed by the state. He said he thinks the budget is fine. He said cash aid is right on. He said the cash aid disbursements are between \$20,000-\$17,000 per month. He said the annual figure of \$250,000 looks right on. President Dillon thanked Director Davis for his work. He said the city does not have to look too far back to see the department's work. He said the Memorial Day program was great. He said Mr. Davis, George Poole and all the other veterans organizations put on a good program. He said it was a nice day and he wants to say thank you. He said he sees what Director Davis does and he thinks he goes above and beyond. He said he thinks the community appreciates it. Councilor Ferullo said he wants to echo President Dillon's sentiments. President Dillon said the Memorial Day weekend program was beautiful. He thanked Director Davis for the event at Ferullo Field. He said it was really, really nice. Director Davis said one of the goals was to recognize the Space Force. Councilor Demers said he wants to echo the sentiments of his colleagues as well as everyone in the community. He said the Hero Act lessens the burden of property tax increases. He said he hopes the city's veterans are taken care of in the community. Chair Viola thanked Director Davis for everything he does. He said the city's 250th Revolutionary War program at Tarky Field was well-done. **Planning/WRA** – Representing the Planning Dept. and the Woburn Redevelopment Authority was Planning Director John Cashell. Motion made by Councilor Demers and seconded by Councilor Ferullo to receive and make part of the permanent record a memorandum and spreadsheet from Director Cashell; approved, 9-0. Director Cashell said the memo and the spreadsheet were compiled by Grant Writer Kevin McDonough. He said the spreadsheet lists all the grants Mr. McDonough has applied for since he was hired last May. He said he really appreciates the amount of work Mr. McDonough has undertaken. He said Mr. McDonough was able to secure \$1,692,605 in grant funding. He said that is an extraordinary amount of money. He said Mr. McDonough wants to acknowledge all the support he has gotten and thanks the City Council for all of the support he has gotten over the past year. He said approximately \$6 million in applications for grants are pending. He said he hopes he can ask the mayor if he is pleased with Mr. McDonough's performance thus far. Mayor Concannon said he is very pleased with Mr. McDonough's performance. Director Cashell said the other parts of his budget are mundane. He said any increases are contractual. He said one line item worth mentioning is consultation. He said there are outlays for hiring consultants to work with the city on the Housing Production Plan and the new Master Plan for downtown. He said the last time the Master Plan was developed for downtown was in the 1960s. He said funding was received through the efforts of Rep. Richard Haggerty and they are compiling a Master Plan for the Industri-Plex site. He said this effort is in anticipation of the completion of the New Boston Street bridge. He said right now in order to get to that area you have to go all the way over to Commerce Way. Councilor Mercer-Bruen asked Director Cashell to tell her about the new Energy Advocate position. Director Cashell said the position will be funded with money from a grant. Councilor Mercer-Bruen asked if it is a 3-year grant. Director Cashell said the city decided to go with a consultant the first year to get it up and running and then hire someone for the next two years. Councilor Mercer-Bruen said she thinks consultants are a great idea. She said if the city hires someone full-time they would have to be paid benefits including health care. She said that is not necessary if the city hires a consultant. Councilor Mercer-Bruen asked about office hours. She said people have come up to her and told her they went to the Planning Dept. office and no one was there. She said it hasn't been just one person. She asked Director Cashell to help her understand what the working hours are. Director Cashell said he is there every day. He said he would love to explain the situation to her. He said the office has been short one person for 90 percent of the year. He said Mr. McDonough has his own office now. Councilor Mercer-

Bruen said the public should know that. Director Cashell said four people in the office wasn't working. He said when you're on a Zoom call, it's mayhem. He said Economic Development Manager Casey Hagerty is often in meetings or off-site. He said no one is glued to their seat. He said he is in meetings all day. Councilor Mercer-Bruen said she is asking questions to Director Cashell about staffing because she gets questions. Director Cashell said they can leave messages on his cell phone. He said he can't be in the office all the time. Councilor Mercer-Bruen thanked Director Cashell for the clarification. Councilor Pappalardo said there is a \$6,000 line item for WRA administration and asked Director Cashell to elaborate on that expenditure. Director Cashell said that money will be spent on an insurance premium for former WRA Executive Director Donald Borchelt. He said that is a legacy cost the city has to pay. He said Mr. Borchelt is retired and the city's obligation for his insurance premium is \$6,000. Councilor Pappalardo asked why no money has been spent from that line item. Director Cashell said the payment is due. He said it will be paid. Councilor DiMambro said the Planning Dept. does an excellent job. He asked if the addition of the Energy Advocate is something the state is pushing. Mayor Concannon said the Energy Advocate and the Municipal Energy Manager will be funded by grants from the utility companies. He said the Energy Advocate is designed to be a voice for the residents to bring down their energy bills. He said he has not decided whether the city will go the consultant route or the employee route. He said the position would be much like the feasibility director. Councilor DiMambro said \$1.692 million in grants is nice. He said hopefully it will double next year. He said the city needs every penny it can get. He said anything the Planning Dept. can do to get grants is very much appreciated. Director Cashell said Mr. McDonough and Ms. Hagerty work hand-in-hand with the mayor. He said there is a lot of consultation with the mayor about grant applications. Councilor DiMambro said he is looking forward to the opening of the New Boston Street bridge. Councilor Demers asked if the council can be provided with quarterly updates about grants. Director Cashell answered affirmatively. Councilor Demers said the City Council being up to date would be very helpful. He said he understands Councilor Mercer-Bruen's concerns about staffing. He said he would have a hard time supporting the hire of two full-time people. He said he does not see why one person couldn't do both jobs. He suggested looking at the consultant route. Director Cashell said this is really a major bailiwick. President Dillon thanked Director Cashell and his staff. He said everyone is great to work with. He said he has reached out to Mr. McDonough and he always responds. He said recently the city obtained a grant for handicapped mats which he said he hopes will be used at Library Park. He said his recent health issues made him realize accessibility issues can be a big deal and a life changer for people. He said using these mats opens your eyes. Director Cashell said no one has been working harder and more diligently than Mr. McDonough. He said Mr. McDonough has gone beyond the call of duty. He said it has been great to have Mr. McDonough on board. Councilor Mercer-Bruen said it would be great if Mr. McDonough came to the council and gave a presentation. President Dillon said he would second that idea. Councilor Mercer-Bruen asked if the grant funding for the energy advocate can be used for a full-time employee or a consultant. Mayor Concannon said the money can be used for either a consultant's salary or salary and benefits. He said he is not sure yet but he would lean toward a consultant the first year. Director Cashell said there are a lot of really exciting things happening downtown with the reinvigorated WRA. Chair Viola thanked Director Cashell for coming. He said he was happy to see Mr. McDonough obtained a \$165,000 grant for the schools. He asked when the offset funding for the Economic Development Manager ends. Mayor Concannon said the funding expires in December. He said the budget contains a half-year of grant funding and a half-year of funding by the city.

Woburn Public Schools – Representing Woburn Public School were School Committee Chair Ellen Crowley and Supt. of Schools Dr. Matthew Crowley. Chair Crowley said going into FY '26 the city has a very successful school system. She said as a City Council, the members are aware how important it is to have an excellent school system. She said the school system has high levels of involvement with students. She said there are programs for children who have sustained trauma and are going through homelessness. She said there are teenagers who are navigating complex social issues. She said there are athletes who will participate in college sports. She said there are students who participate in art and music. She said there are excellent principals in the school system. She said there is a leadership team that works 24/7 that is dedicated and selfless toward public service. She said the School Dept.'s budget is all about people. She said she is extremely optimistic about the future of the Woburn Public School system. She said the school budget has already been reduced by \$440,000 and asked the council not to make any further adjustments. She asked the council to please not cut the budget any further. Motion made by Councilor Toro and seconded by Councilor DiMambro to accept and make part of the permanent record a document from Supt. Crowley entitled "Woburn Public Schools Successes and Achievements;" approved, 9-0. Supt. Crowley said he wants to give a sincere thank you to the City Council. He said he recognizes the budget reflects a significant investment in the Woburn Public School system. He said the entire city recognizes the need to pull together for the kids. He said Chair Crowley alluded to the fine arts program as one of the best in the region. He said school musicals are sold out. He said Tanner Fest is one of the most popular events of the school year. He said the second row of photos in the handout represents literacy initiatives. He said he invites City Council members to participate. He said the DIBELS scores have increased. He said the reading specialists are paying dividends. He said the third row of photos depicts a series of events that brings the community together. He said the fourth row of photos depicts the WPS' Early Childhood Program. He said kids from age 3 on up are educated. He said Early Childhood Coordinator Lisa Murphy is doing a really nice job. He said from ages 3 and up the Woburn Public School system does it all. He said the fifth row of photos depicts an early college program that had over 100 students who signed up to take college classes through the University of Massachusetts at Lowell. He said students can earn up to 12 college credits. He said free college credits are game-changing. He said the school system is trying to meet the needs of all students. He said the sixth row of photographs represents the on-going investment in building renovations, which have provided for flexible learning environments. He said it is a credit to the investment the School Dept. and the City Council have made together. He said there have been investments in safety. He said the School Dept. has to take school safety seriously. He said the School Dept. came to the City Council for door locks. He said Director of School Facilities Len Burnham is coordinating this effort. He said four schools will be re-keyed. He said the seventh row of photos indicates how professional development is paying dividends in the schools. He said Asst. Supt. of Curriculum & Instruction Courtney Young and Asst. Supt. of Student Services Maureen Ryan have put together an incredibly robust professional development program. He said one of the things that needed to be changed was to help people use the tools they need so they can be successful. He said the eighth row of photos illustrates Tanner Pride. He said the high school hockey team made it to the state semifinals and the girls basketball team made it to the state quarterfinal round. He said the Latin Team and the Math Team continue to flourish. He said it is mind-blowing how many activities there are. He said the Black Student Union remains very active and the School Dept. is very proud of the array of extracurricular activities that are offered. He said the School Dept. is looking to hire for next year once the budget is approved. He

said he is looking forward to answering any budget questions the member of the council may have. He said the budget process for FY '26 started in December. He said there were meetings with every principal. He said 52 line items were reduced. He said if it wasn't being spent, they removed it. He thanked Alex Dizio, Director of School Finance & Operations, and Patti McKinnon, Asst. Director of Finance & Operations, for their diligence. He said this has been a collaborative process. He said the total proposed budget is \$96,402,440, which is a 6.68 percent increase. He said the salary roll over alone is 5.6 percent, and the positions that were added after the budget was passed last year raise that ratio to 6.4 percent. He said he thinks the department is more efficient financially. He said the Special Education out-of-district costs have been reduced by \$400,000. He said Dr. Ryan worked incredibly closely with Mr. Dizio to maintain the Special Education budget at \$33 million. He said it costs money to invest in people. He said the district is also looking at retirement for positions that will not be backfilled. He said the Curriculum Dept. is going to be reduced by one position. He said they have received grants. He said there are pre-kindergarten grants. He said they use grant money to pay for lunch monitors. He said he knows the School Dept. is asking for a great deal of money. He said he wouldn't ask for it if the district didn't need it. Councilor Mercer-Bruen asked City Auditor Doherty if the reductions to the 52 line items were through discussions in the WuStat format. Auditor Doherty's response was unheard as he was speaking from the audience. Councilor Mercer-Bruen asked if there is any documentation on each line item. Chair Viola asked City Auditor Doherty to approach the podium and speak close to the microphone. City Auditor Doherty said there is detail with which Mr. Dizio could provide the committee. Councilor Mercer-Bruen said she would love to get that documentation. She said during the review of the salaries in last year's budget, there were discrepancies, maybe three or four, that were higher. She asked if City Auditor Doherty could give an overview of what that was all about. She said she was terribly concerned about it. City Auditor Doherty said there is little bit more discretion on the school side of the budget. He said some salaries were overfunded and others were underfunded. He said Mr. Dizio and his team brought that in line. Councilor Mercer-Bruen asked how many salaries in this budget are actually true to what is being presented to the committee tonight. Supt. Crowley said there were some unsettled principal contracts last year, before the budget was settled. He said he also added 20 days to elementary level principal contracts. He said they are working more and the salaries needed to be market adjusted. Councilor Mercer-Bruen asked if the salary numbers that are being presented will stay the same, for the most part. Supt. Crowley answered affirmatively. Councilor Toro said school officials have explained the process they've used to reduce the budget, understanding the fiscal impact on the city. He said having two children in the school system he sees every day the hard work the teachers, the support staff and the administration puts in, specifically at the Goodyear School. He said he has visited a lot of the schools on those Friday tours. He said reading over the budget he was happy to see decreases in electricity and general education. He said he was little concerned with the increases in the special education transportation. He said it is what it is. He said he assumes the large increase is part of a contractual negotiation. He asked why such a large increase was agreed to. He said he thinks the increase is 22 percent. Supt. Crowley said the district does not negotiate special education transportation. He said the district is part of the SEEM Collaborative, which has not raised rates in the past few years. He said they re-opened the bid this year and there was an increase. He said the district has a good relationship with NRT and SEEM. He said he is grateful for everything they do. He said Woburn is fortunate to have such a high-functioning collaborative. Councilor Toro said he did like to see in the budget the addition of the building subs. He said he does like to

see consistent faces in the building instead of random substitutes. He acknowledged Chair Crowley's comment about how school officials are here to advocate for the children. He said the situation is a little different for the City Council, which has advocate for both the children and the taxpayers. He said one of the biggest drivers is the budget and how that impacts people's taxes. He said the city made a large investment in the schools last year. He said the council wants to continue to support the schools. He asked if the administration has put any thought into how that \$440,000 reduction in the Special Education budget will be absorbed. Chair Crowley said the School Committee meets tomorrow night. She said she does not want to speak for the committee. She said Special Education transportation is highly complex and is required for any child with an IEP. Asst. Supt. Ryan said it is a big line item. She said the contract with SEEM allows Woburn to share rides with other communities. She said it is a fairly significant savings. She said even though it is an astronomical savings, it's actually cost effective. Councilor Toro asked if the School Dept. is getting the most competitive price. Asst. Supt. Ryan said they will be getting quotes at least once a week. She said there is legislation that would help to provide districts with some relief. She said it is a significant expense. Councilor Toro said in the budget he sees a line item for horizontal moves. He asked for an explanation of what that is and why it is in the budget. Supt. Crowley said the way the teachers' contract reads is they are on steps, but if they earn enough credits toward a Master's degree, they would move horizontally. He said the more credits teachers earn, the more they get paid. Councilor Toro said, for example, a teacher earns \$100,000 per year by gets a raise of \$4,000 mid-year, that line item would cover that increase as a mid-year raise. Supt. Crowley said that is fair to say. Mr. Dizio said staff has until March 1 to let the administration know. Councilor Toro said these are salary increases that are not known at the time of the budget. Supt. Crowley said Mr. Dizio has a spreadsheet that allows him to tally what the teachers get paid and he can allocate that. Councilor Toto asked if the raises would have been known by the end of March. Supt. Crowley said these numbers are anticipated. Councilor Toro said there are significant increases, in some instances over 40 percent and in some instances over 100 percent, and he said his is sure there are some explanations. He said at the Reeves School, for example, for the nurse, there is a 101.48 percent change in salary. He said he is assuming there is a second employee. Supt. Crowley said that is correct. Chair Crowley said the salary follows the person. Councilor Toro thanked the School Committee members who are here for showing up. President Dillon said the one thing that everyone here will agree on is the School Dept. needs to get more help from the federal government and state government, especially with special education. He said he does not know how they can continue to ignore this. He said he appreciates everything school officials do. He said he has sat in on a lot of School Dept. budget meetings in the mayor's office. He said he knows it is not a simple process. He said the City Council has an obligation to ask a lot of tough questions but it also must make sure the city continues on the path to make sure all the residents and constituents can continue to live in Woburn. He said many elderly residents are on a fixed pension or a fixed Social Security income. He said to him Woburn is still a blue collar city. He said Rep. Haggerty was here last week and said between 43-45 percent of housing in Woburn consists of rental units. He said the council has to think of the taxpayers as well. He said the council would love to give the School Dept. whatever it needs but the councilors have to take into account both sides. He said he knows everyone is working hard but this isn't a simple process. He thanked the School Dept. for advancing Tanner Pride. He said it is a great gift to the community. He said in the 2025 budget for the Joyce Middle School the total principal budget for salary was \$180,141. He said he knows the principal went from the Joyce to the high school. He said when he looks at the 2026

budget the line item for the principal is \$172,798 and asked what the reason for the discrepancy is. Supt. Crowley said the high school principal salary was published in advance. He said they have accounted for it. President Dillon said it would have been nice in the presentation to see those adjustments. Supt. Crowley said there is going to be a shift in the Joyce because the assistant principal is becoming the principal there. President Dillon asked what the high school principal is making. Supt. Crowley said he can get that figure to the council. He said he thinks it's close to \$200,000. President Dillon said he went through the FY '25 and FY '26 budgets page by page and it would have been nice if that was explained. He said his second question is about legal expenses. He asked School Dept. officials why there is such a big increase. Supt. Crowley said he thinks the increase is \$25,000, if he is not mistaken. He said there are multiple reasons. He said the School Dept. is a big organization and there are a lot of labor issues that require someone beyond a human resources director. He said the School Dept. has had to use legal counsel to either guide the HRD or manage the labor relations that the department has had. He said with that in mind the line item was increased for next year. Chair Crowley said the School Committee added that \$25,000 back in because it wanted legal guidance during contract negotiations. President Dillon asked if there is anything else that may be in conflict with the school budget that was given to the council. Supt. Crowley said they are budgeting in real time for what the School Dept. thinks it will need. He said they do not know what school will look like in September. He said there is nothing in the budget that addresses an additional staff member. President Dillon said he should have phrased his question differently and asked if there is anything different now than there was when the council was given this budget. Chair Crowley said the School Committee's budget is different than the mayor's budget. President Dillon said he recognizes the \$440,000 discrepancy in the Special Education outlay. Supt. Crowley said that is something they are working through. He said he is remiss to touch student facing positions, but they may have to. He said one of the positions is a new ask for an Asst. Superintendent. He said he is going to recommend that position be taken out. He said that was a \$185,000 line item. He said there is a \$100,000 increase in line items for substitutes that he does not want to reduce. President Dillon said the council does not want to see anyone lose their job. Councilor Ferullo thanked school officials for everything they do. He said his commitment to the Woburn Public School system started 61 years ago when he went to first grade at the Veterans Memorial School. He said 49 years ago he was a proud graduate of the class of 1976 from Woburn High. He said he looks for an open and honest communication. He said he is on their team. He said when he asks a question to please not reply that the City Council does not want to work with the School Dept. He said he is committed to working with school officials. He said the portable classroom issue is floating around. He said he wants to work on a permanent solution to early childhood education. He said there is long-term issue of new schools. He said when he asks a question he is not checking on the School Dept. He said the School Dept. is asking the council to co-sign a check for \$96 million. He said when he asks a question, it's because he wants to know. He said he needs to understand the school budget so he can respond to residents who ask him about their tax bills. Councilor Pappalardo said he met with school officials a few weeks ago and he got an appreciation for just how complicated the school budget is. He said he thought last year's budget was top heavy. He said this budget feels like it's in the same realm of top-heaviness. He asked if there have been any additional positions at the administrative level beyond what was there last year. Supt. Crowley said there are no new administrative positions. Chair Crowley said a considerable number of student facing positions were added but they did not add any administrative positions. Supt. Crowley said in the past four years they have added 70-80 WTA

positions but they have not added any administrative positions. He said an associate principal at Woburn High School is a need. Councilor Pappalardo said in his opinion the teachers are the secret sauce. Councilor Demers said this is his 11th school budget as a member of either the School Committee or the City Council. He said he has been able to see what has grown in terms of the needs of the district. He said he was looking through the division of local services budget list for FY '25 and there are 245 cities and towns with a total operating budget less than what the city spends on Woburn Public Schools. He said it is not a criticism. He said there is a lot going on in the district. He said there are a lot of challenges but those challenges are overcome. He said the city is doing a great job in the schools. He said he appreciates some of the comments his colleagues have made, but when he looks at that anecdotal number, he thinks there needs to be management in place to make sure that the trains are running on time. He said another way of thinking about that is by imagining cutting out department heads here at City Hall. He said it would almost lead toward rudderlessness. He said when he was on the School Committee, the number one thing he was constantly asked was the teachers needed more support. He said that's why the curriculum coordinators were brought in. He said those folks are there to help teachers be better at their trade. He said his only warning is if the city does not look at the School Dept. with a long-term vision toward support, the system is going to lose some great employees. He said he would also like to reiterate his call that the council needs quarterly Liaison Committee meetings. He said come October 1, there are student move-ins. He said last fiscal year there were student move-ins of the refugee migrants. He said that is just something that hits midstream. He said you never see that on the city-side. He said the only comparable issue is the PFAS issue. He said he has a question about the 403B annuity program for \$100,000. Mr. Dizio said more people are getting that benefit and there are increased management fees. He said in the sense of true transparency and good government he would like to see the names of School Dept. employees in the budget. He said he heard there was a request that information be provided. He said there has been an Excel sheet that's been provided in previous years. He said there is a lot of supplemental income in these positions and he thinks it's important to know who is receiving longevity payments and additional stipends and travel allowances. He said the salary of every employee is in the city budget and he thinks it's only fair that the salary information for School Dept. employees be in there. Chair Crowley said the School Dept. follows best practices and they have advised districts to not put names in public documents and not circulate them, for various reasons. Councilor Demers said she thinks it is a transparency thing. He said he understands the rationale and he may not agree with it, but transparency is huge, especially with this amount of money. Chair Crowley said the names are available on the city's website. She said the city has a website where you can search salaries. Chair Viola said you do have to know the person's name to search for their salary. Councilor Demers said when he was the chair of the School Committee there were a lot of things the chair was privy to that others weren't. He said one of those things was finding a new legal provider because the School Committee wasn't happy with its previous one. He said one of the things that always irked him is why the School Dept. doesn't have an in-house lawyer like the city has a City Solicitor. Chair Crowley said the School Dept. has two forms of legal services – the Special Education side and the labor side. She said Woburn is very much in line with other districts in that regard. Councilor Demers thanked school officials for everything they do and he understands they have to make tough decisions. He said he has faith that the School Dept. and the City Council can enhance communications. Supt. Crowley said one of the things Councilor Demers talked about was the high needs population. He said over 50 percent of the student body qualifies as high needs, whether it is Special Education, EL or

socioeconomically disadvantaged., or a combination of all three. He said with high needs comes an expense. He said 15 of Woburn's students are multi-lingual. He said 25 percent are on an IEP. He said the district has seen the growth in the numbers of special education positions. He said student behavior has changed. He said teaching is different now than when Councilor Demers was on the School Committee. He said teachers are doing yeoman's work with the most diverse students in terms of needs. Councilor Demers asked if there has been a major boom in student population. Chair Crowley said student population increased after Covid. She said in 2023 there were 500 students who moved into the district and 200 moved out. Councilor Demers asked about the difference as opposed to 10 years ago. Chair Crowley said 10 years ago the ratio of high needs students was about 30 percent. She said the composition of learners has changed along with the amount. Councilor Campbell asked about the building service contract at \$700,000, grounds maintenance at \$90,000 and Parks Dept. at \$95,000. She asked specifically about the building service contract. Mr. Dizio said that is work that has been done internally by School Dept. staff that involves solar panels and electricity systems. He said that is why the line item for electricity went down. Councilor Campbell asked about the \$90,000 line item for grounds maintenance. Mr. Dizio said that could be anything specific to internal maintenance. He said the contract is a catchall for internal and external maintenance that doesn't fall into a specific bucket. Councilor Campbell asked about the \$95,000 line item for Parks Dept. services. She asked if that money is coming to the city. Supt. Crowley answered affirmatively. Councilor Campbell said there is a \$210,000 line item for copier equipment leases and said that seems like a lot. Mr. Dizio said he believes that is level funded year over year. Supt. Crowley said it is a lot of money but they can't run a school department without copiers. Councilor Campbell said she does not want to cut the copiers but wants to know if there is someone who looks at contracts like this to get them lower. Supt. Crowley said they did that this year. He said they switched a couple of years back to a new company because it was a lower cost. He said it is something the School Dept. is mindful of. Councilor Campbell said there is a \$164,000 line item for curriculum salaries and curriculum support staff for \$905,000. She said it almost seems like it should go the other way around. Supt. Crowley said the lower number is Asst. Supt. Young's salary and the bigger number is for her staff. Councilor Campbell asked how many people are in the support staff. Chair Viola said there are six curriculum coordinators and 19 interventionists. Supt. Crowley said the interventionists are part-time. He said when new curricula are adopted they want to make sure students and staff are supported. He said having people to assist with the support is a priority. Councilor Campbell said her two biggest pieces are the whole early childhood education and special education being \$33 million when their entire budget is \$96 million. She said she knows Asst. Supt. Ryan is doing everything she can and it seems like she is really saving a lot of money. She said she also feels for the health of the city's budget that they can do something else. She said that's huge. She said it would cost \$23 million to renovate the Wyman School. She said perhaps it could be added onto. She asked if there is a building that can be used to house all of these individuals. She said if at that point you spend \$33 million it's all going toward the city. She said she recalls Chair Crowley saying there would not be enough classrooms in the Wyman School. She said she feels the city can't keep going down this path, spending this kind of money without a solution. She said she knows the School Dept. is doing everything it can, and it's band-aids, but is that a possibility. She said she would love for Mayor Concannon to look into this. She said if it's \$33 million this year, it's going to go up next year. She thinks if they can centralize curriculum, it's the smart way to go. She said in Waltham they don't sell a building. She said they renovate. She said the city should not be selling its buildings,

it should be renovating them because it needs the help. She asked if this has been discussed. Chair Crowley said the School Committee would be open to any collaboration on using an existing building in the city. She said the Wyman has difficulties to be used for an ECP facility. She said it is three floors, it doesn't have elevators, and it needs to be renovated. She said the School Committee is certainly open to the idea. She said the mandate is the School Dept. always tries to build in-district programming because the expense is when children are placed in out-of-district placements. She said that is when the dollar signs are going to start to go up. She said the School Dept. always tries to develop in-district programming so the learners will be in the community and be taught with their peers. She said rising costs of Special Education are something cities really need to brace themselves for. She said Asst. Supt. Ryan said there could be some circuit breaker relief for transportation and that is a very good sign. She said other than that it might just be the city has to brace itself for the increased costs. She said she does think the early childhood program could be revenue producing if there is a facility where it could be run on its own for a full day. Supt. Crowley said to clarify a little bit the \$33 million for Special Education is everybody in the Woburn Public Schools. He said there are Special Education students in all 10 schools and out of the district. He said if there is a building, let's talk. He said they do have a space issue. Motion made by Councilor Toro and seconded by Councilor Demers to take a 5-minute recess; all in favor, 9-0. Chair Viola recessed the meeting at 8:30 p.m. Motion made by Councilor Toro and seconded by Councilor Demers to return to the regular order of business; all in favor, 9-0. Chair Viola reconvened the meeting at 8:37 p.m. Councilor DiMambro said he wants to thank Supt. Crowley, Chair Crowley and the assistant superintendents. He said it definitely helped him to be involved in those budget meetings in Mayor Concannon's office. He said to hear from Asst. Supt. Ryan and Asst. Supt. Young what is going on from an administrative level. He said he applauds all their efforts. He said he appreciates everyone's work. He said everyone cares about kids, education and the education the city is providing for the kids. He said the City Council and the School Dept. are not here to fight a tug-of-war. He said the council wants to give the kids the best education the city can provide. He said it is a global market and today education makes the playing field even. He said \$96 million is a big number. He said there can be more done in terms of transparency. He said they have to go back to the numbers. He said he wants to know what was spent and who did what. He said the residents are asking for that information. He said he does not think the complexity of the school budget is fully understood. He said he didn't. He said it's almost a 15-credit college course learning how the School Dept. works. He said everyone wants the best for the kids but these budgets are getting more and more unsustainable and he does not know where the money is going to come from. He said he expects the school budget alone to exceed \$100 million next year. He said city officials have to find a way to offset costs. He said the city can't rely on tax increases. He said they will tax people right out of the city. He said if there are creative ways to reduce the budget, the council needs to know. He said his only question is he noticed there were decreases in the budgets for the Goodyear and Altavesta elementary schools and asked why. Asst. Supt. Young said the budget for the Altavesta went down because the number of classroom teachers is being reduced and they reallocated staff. She said there are four retirements at the Goodyear as well as staff movement. Councilor DiMambro asked about a 4 percent decrease in the facilities number. He said the schools take a beating and maintenance of the facilities is a key. Mr. Dizio said there are two specific items. He said one is the reduction of electricity costs and the other is a retirement and the position was backfilled at a lower salary. Councilor DiMambro said he encourages the School Dept. to take more advantage of WuStat. He said he encourages the

School Dept. to find other revenue streams. Councilor Mercer-Bruen said Special Education includes things like dyslexia and other kinds of reading challenges that need to be supported by education. She said that budget number when you think about what is being provided is not a big number. She said that children with learning disabilities would be separated really disturbs her. She said back in her day kids with dyslexia were just dismissed as being dumb. She said there are so many parents out there who are struggling with children with learning disabilities. She said she would hate to see the School Dept. consider something like that. She said the law says the city can't. She said she thinks it's really important for the council to get a budget the way it has been previously presented with all the names. Supt. Crowley said his quick answer is the administration can provide that. He said it may not be accurate. He said every time there is an internal move, the names would not be reflected. Councilor Mercer-Bruen said she would still like to see the names. She said she would like to see a list of positions that will be adjusted once the school year starts. She said she would like to be provided with what the School Dept. does know. She said she would also like to know how many positions have not been filled from last year's asks and how many positions the administration is asking for that will not be filled by July 1. Supt. Crowley said he was reminded during the break that there are three administrative contracts that have not yet been settled. He said those will be adjusted. Councilor Mercer-Bruen asked if the administration could provide the council with the list of what it knows before the council meets again. Chair Viola asked Councilor Mercer-Bruen if she would like that information provided prior to the public hearing. Councilor Mercer-Bruen said she would be happy with three days before. Chair Crowley said the School Committee is meeting tomorrow night so those requests can be considered then. She said she also wants to address something about the language based learning disabilities. She said in 2016 there was a robust overhaul of dyslexia screening, and there are a lot of structures in place to identify learners that may have language based learning disabilities. She said that really ties into the literacy program they are doing as well. She said dyslexia has come a long way in terms of language based learning disabilities. Councilor Mercer-Bruen said her child was very lucky in that it was identified very early, but for different reasons. She said they wouldn't test students back then. She said that was a long time ago. She thanked the school officials for everything they do. She said the work they do is not easy and the council is grateful for it every single day. Councilor Demers said as the Ward 4 Councilor he felt the need to respond to the discussion about the Wyman School, which he said has become a hot button issue. He said when the Hurld-Wyman School was petitioned for, the city indicated to the MSBA that the city no longer intended to use the Wyman School for an educational purpose. He said his concern is when the city starts bandying discussions about re-hashing the issue of re-using the Wyman the city would open itself to either legal challenges or a not-quite-welcoming atmosphere with the MSBA when it comes to future school building projects. He said there is one more school building project to go. He said the Wyman neighbors were told the building would no longer be used for educational purposes. He said it would cost \$30-\$35 million to renovate it, and School Committee members are saying it is inadequate for an early childhood education program. He said Waltham's tax rate is about \$1.80 higher. He said that could explain why they are not selling their buildings. He said Waltham has an almost 50 percent higher tax base than Woburn and their tax rate is considerably higher. He said he understands the idea of saving buildings but there is also a financial commitment that would be asked of the taxpayers. He said he does not find that appetite out there right now. Councilor Campbell said she disagrees with Councilor Demers. She said she does not favor getting rid of buildings when the city does not have to. She said she would rather see a building renovated than

sold. She said she was talking about pre-school, not special education, as having a separate facility. She said she thinks there is a lot of redistricting taking place because of that program. Chair Crowley said the School Dept. would need 20 classrooms to run an effective early childhood program. Councilor Campbell said she knows other school districts are looking into getting rid of the iPhones during the day and asked if Woburn has considered it. Chair Crowley said there has been robust discussion about it and School Committee member Colleen Cormier is still looking at data. She said it is still up for discussion. She said there are a lot of complex policy items that need to be discussed. Councilor Campbell said she thinks it would be beneficial. Supt. Crowley said there are phone caddies on the backs of doors at the high school for students to put their phones in during class. He said there is legislation at the state level so policy isn't left to cities and towns. He said different districts have had mixed results. He said he thinks it's distracting. He said redistricting isn't only because of the early childhood program. He said there are pockets of the city that are more crowded than others. He said it's not an ECP issue, it's where the students are. Chair Viola said he is sensing the common theme from the committee tonight is accountability, transparency and collaboration. He said we've come a long way since last year but there is still work that needs to be done. He said the budget is exorbitant again but the needs of the students are there. He said on page 65 of the school budget it lists under human resources a 52.22 percent increase in administrative costs. Mr. Dizio said that is due to a change in personnel. He said the person who was there ended up being the payroll generalist/HR position from last year. He said he believes there was a transfer in from the high school and within that unit they transfer with their salary. Chair Viola asked if that means a new administrative assistant came in with a salary of \$82,000. Mr. Dizio said the employee had been at the high school for a long time. Chair Viola said on page 77 of the school budget under Special Education salaries under coordinators there are 7.40 full-time employees for a percent change of 91.77. He said the line item went from \$493,000 to \$946,487. He said that is a considerable increase over one year. Asst. Supt. Ryan said there was someone who came from a different position already in the district, and with that came a salary. She said there was also a salary that was covered in a grant that was rolled into the budget. Chair Viola said there were two administrative staff members in the Special Education unit with a salary of \$181,006 last year and a salary of \$226,100. Asst. Supt. Ryan said there was a position that was unfilled last year that was a contractual position in the unit where somebody had left and somebody else came in. She said it was another instance of in-house movements. Chair Viola said the district is looking at modular classrooms for the ECP program. He asked the administration to look for some space at the high school as well. He would prefer to make it just like Burlington has it. He said he would rather put doors that lock so nobody can get in there. He said he would rather put money into a hard structure like that than he would into modulares. Chair Crowley said that is a great idea. She said the district is open-minded. She said space at the high school is very limited. She said teachers would have to lose their rooms. She said that didn't seem appetizing to introduce to the staff at the high school. She said solving one problem might create another. She said retrofitting for an ECP might be difficult. She said the School Committee will certainly keep it in mind, however.

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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 9:09 p.m.

A TRUE RECORD ATTEST

Gordon Vincent
Clerk of Committees