

**Alexandria School Board
Budget Advisory Committee**

**February 23, 2021 - 7PM
Location: Zoom**

MINUTES

Budget Advisory Committee Members Present: Erin Dahlin (Chair); Nancy Drane (Secretary); Sean McEneaney, Sukumar Rao

ACPS Staff Liaison Present: Robert Easley, ACPS Director of Budget and Fiscal Compliance

Alexandria School Board Liaison Present: Ramee Gentry, Alexandria School Board; Susan Neilson, Clerk, Alexandria City Public Schools School Board

The meeting was called to order at 7:05 p.m.

Welcome, Public Comment, and Preliminaries - The meeting began with a welcome from Chair Dahlin.

There were no public participants, and thus no public comment period was needed.

The committee tabled consideration of the January meeting minutes to the March meeting.

Ms. Drane inquired about the BAC End of Year Report (2019-2020) and BAC Scope of Work (2020-2021). Those were recirculated to Mr. Easley to then be reviewed by Superintendent Hutchings and then presented to the School Board under the consent calendar.

ACPS Staff Report - Mr. Easley provided a staff report to all present.

The School Board approved the Superintendent's proposed Combined Funds budget last week. There were a few adjustments that were made after the Superintendent first presented the proposed budget to the board. \$2.1M of additional revenue from the State of Virginia was incorporated into the budget. Equivalent expenses included staffing (a senior buyer position) and compensation increases (1% increase to eligible employees to offset increased employee benefit expenses and about \$200,000 in order to raise base compensation for positions that were deemed to be "below market" in a recent compensation study). There will be a joint budget work session between the City Council and School Board on Wednesday, March 3.

There has been some activity at the State level with respect to teacher salaries. There are competing proposals in the House and Senate to incentivize increases in teacher compensation,

5% or 3%, respectively. The idea is that the state would match the additional cost if a local jurisdiction committed to the salary increase – although that match would be only a portion of the funds needed to realize the full increase (with the balance having to be raised by the local jurisdiction). In the case of ACPS, they'd need to either reprogram funds to be made available, or ask the City to provide additional funding. This is still being negotiated at the state level, so there is not yet sufficient clarity on the financial implications – but more to come.

ACPS is also considering other potential Federal funding opportunities. Additional CARES Act funding could translate to an additional \$15M, with additional funding opportunities through the proposed American Recovery Act. Once confirmed, ACPS might be able to reprogram expenses currently in the combined funds budget to be offset by these Federal funds, opening up additional funding for other priorities. There are lots of moving parts that will have to be worked out. Generally, these Federal funds can support a broad range of expenses including supporting the unique needs of low-income, ELL, racial minorities, foster youth; emergency preparedness and response; sanitation training and supplies; technology; mental health supports; programs to address learning loss; facilities repairs and improvements; and increased social/emotional learning. ACPS has not yet made priorities as to how these funds might be expended, but will try to target one-time, surge type expenses since these will be one-time funds. Some examples include the classroom monitors being hired during hybrid learning and additional support to help with the feasibility of offering SEAL Mondays during hybrid learning.

Finally, Mr. Easley was asked whether the fund balance has been utilized during this time, and he confirmed that there has been no need to do that.

BAC Activities - The committee then turned to a discussion of executing our Scope of Work for academic year 2020-2021. Chair Dahlin reviewed next steps for our work. We identified six potential jurisdictions (below) that we might explore further:

City of Falls Church
City of Fairfax
City of Richmond
City of Fredericksburg
Arlington County
Fairfax County

There was some discussion about which made the most sense to pursue, with the additional jurisdictions of City of Newport News and City of Hampton Roads being suggested. In the end, we decided on 4 jurisdictions, with the following BAC members taking on the responsibility for initial research.

City of Richmond – Erin Dahlin
City of Newport News – Sean McEneaney
Arlington County – Sukumar Rao

Fairfax County – Nancy Drane

BAC members are being asked to at the very least, collect and explore the budget calendar(s) for their assigned jurisdiction and upload information into BAC's shared Google Drive no later than March 8. (BAC members may find it feasible to explore other issues, as outlined below.)

We will explore having a shared document that might allow for a presentation/comparison of each jurisdiction against Alexandria's budget calendar.

The collected materials will then be reviewed by BAC members during the March 16 meeting.

After reviewing this data at the March 16 meeting, we will develop a plan for further research and/or interviews. Mr. Easley may be able to assist with any needed requests for information.

The goals here are two-fold: (a) comparison of the sequencing of budget decision-making by School Board and City/County; and (b) efficiencies that other jurisdictions may have employed in the budget calendar in order to streamline the process (e.g., limited number of public engagement sessions; less add/delete sessions; etc.)

Topics that we might potentially want to explore in each jurisdiction include:

1. Budget Calendar(s): (a) School Board and (b) City/County
 - a. *Key dates*: release of proposed budget by Superintendent to School Board; School Board vote on proposed budget; release of City/County proposed budget by City Manager or equivalent; City/County vote on final budget
2. School Board composition/structure (including whether there is a BAC equivalent)
3. Formal interplay between School Board and City/County around budget setting (e.g., joint budget work sessions, meetings, etc.)
4. Level of public engagement during School Board budget process (e.g., community budget forum, # of public hearings, etc.)
5. Consideration of potential streamlining of some of the more time-consuming aspects of the budget process (e.g., development of budget book)
6. Rules of engagement for budget process (e.g., # of add/deletes, etc.)
7. Whether, how and when budget priority setting is made and how it is incorporated into budget planning and decision making.

To the extent we cannot glean this from publicly available information, Robert may be able to facilitate conversation with his counterparts in other jurisdictions. We could, for example, compile a memorandum with a list of questions or requests we'd like to pursue that he could pass along.

A rough timeline for our work is as follows:

March 8 – BAC members complete initial review of other jurisdictions

March 16 – BAC meets to review preliminary information

March-April – BAC members do additional research based on questions above or other issues raised during the March BAC meeting

April 13 – BAC members post additional information for review

April 20 (To be confirmed) – BAC meets to discuss additional information and brainstorm possible recommendations

April-May – BAC prepares memorandum to School Board

May 18 – BAC reviews and approves memorandum for submission to the School Board

June 3 – Memorandum placed on School Board Meeting agenda; BAC is available for questions

The meeting adjourned at 8:10 p.m.