

Budget Advisory Committee

January 12, 2016

Location: [ACPS Central Office at 1340 Braddock Place*](#)

Agenda

Present

Michael Carrasco
Gina Gargano-Amari
Steve Gordon
Patrice Linehan
Brett McParland
Dorene Pickup
Janine Rubitski

Absent

Sabrina Melendez
Nancy Pasfield
Sahr Pombor
Matthew Stensrud
Eric Williams

Excused

Steven Berbeco

BAC Introductions - The committee welcomed new Board liaison to the Budget Advisory Committee (BAC), Hon. Hal Cardwell, and new Board member, Hon. Margaret Lorber, who both joined their first meeting since the official Board installation earlier in the month.

Approval of Agenda –Michael Carrasco made a motion to approve the agenda for the January 12, 2015 meeting, which was seconded by Dorene Pickup and approved unanimously.

Approval of Minutes – There was not a quorum of BAC members present for the December 8, 2015 meeting so there are no official meeting minutes for December. Since the December BAC meeting was dedicated to preparation for the Superintendent’s Public Forum on the Budget, held December 15, 2015, the notes from the Chair’s remarks during the December 15th meeting were accepted in place of official minutes for December 8th. The December notes were approved unanimously following a motion from Janine Rubitski, seconded by Brett Mc Parland. They will be sent to the Clerk of the Board and posted to the ACPS website.

Welcome: Communication and Comments to BAC – Members of the committee introduced themselves to the new Board members and highlighted there reasons for joining BAC along with some of the skills and perspectives they bring to the work.

Old Business

Leadership – In September, the BAC secretary position became vacant. We discussed the urgent need to fill the position so that we can fulfill the requirements of the committee and ensure public transparency. After some discussion, Gina Gargano-Amari nominated Brett McParland for the position of secretary and the nomination was seconded by Michael Carrasco. Mr. McParland was elected unanimously and agreed to assume the position of secretary in February 2016.

Communication – The Chair distributed the infographic that is being developed as a sample display of the budget calendar to generate visual interest and convey ways the public can get involved in the budget deliberations at various points in the process. The plan is to reach out to the ACPS Communication Department staff with some ideas on how to display budget content.

- Public Participation – Generally, citizens engage in the budget process during the Board add/delete phase of the work. BAC is trying to encourage the public to engage in the budget process earlier, when key decisions and prioritizing of funding issues takes place.
- Public Forum on the Budget – Some BAC members were surprised that so few people from the public showed up for the Superintendent’s Forum on December 15, 2015. There was very little public participation. In addition to approximately six BAC members who joined the meeting, there were only three other citizens in attendance. Most people agreed that the timing was difficult, because the meeting date was close to the holidays and there were other events that evening. Last year, the public forum on the budget took place in November and attracted more people. It was not clear whether it was better publicized (e.g., phone call, email, twitter) or whether co-hosting of the meeting with the Parent-Teacher Association Council (PTAC) increased attendance. This year, some members received notice from multiple sources (e.g., phone call, flyer), but the timing of the kick-off meeting at Jefferson-Houston (on the strategic plan) and competing events probably led to a lower turn-out.
 - Committee members recommended planning earlier and encouraged staff to work with the PTAC on communication efforts. PTAC has a good network of communication that is coordinated well with ACPS staff.
 - It was also confusing to try to combine the budget forum with information on redistricting updates. In the end, it was a good decision by staff to focus only on the budget - instead of both the budget and redistricting as originally advertised.

Staff Report – There was no staff report in January. In February, Kevin North will join the meeting to talk about personnel issues in relation to the budget.

New Business and Reports

School Board Chair’s Meeting with Advisory Board Leaders – There was a meeting of all School Board Advisory Chairs in early January to discuss revisions to the Advisory Committee policies and introduce a new Orientation Handbook. The BAC Chair was traveling and asked for a volunteer from the membership to attend as her designee. Mike Brookbank attended the meeting. BAC gave input on the policies last year, and Mr. Brookbank was involved and familiar with the conversations that led to the recommendations made by BAC. The Chair will share the Handbook and policy updates when the Board adopts them and they become available.

Capital Improvement Program – Prior to the meeting, the Chair sent a link to the CIP budget for the members to review. During the meeting, she asked members to share their reactions. Some of the main comments follow below.

- Although we have heard that the direction of the CIP has shifted from a repair approach to a modernization approach, we don’t have a sense about how the budget has changed as a result of the shift.

- It would be helpful to see the CIP priorities and how the priorities translate to the budget allocations.
- During the Public Forum, we didn't have a budget that was approved yet. Can the Public Forum come after the budget is released?
- It would be helpful to have a sample budget that is annotated with some descriptions. This could serve as a guide to the public and would also be good for new Board members who are faced immediately with budget decisions. (e.g., annotated budget from last year shared by experienced Board member helped new Board member tremendously).
- It would be useful to show how the CIP and Operating budgets evolved and what it means.
- The Superintendent lays out the budget he thinks is needed regardless of what funding the City has.
- Given the fiscal constraints faced by the city, it is important to state the needs so that the case for funding is clear.
- An Executive Summary is essential for communicating the budget to the public. This year's budget is improved from previous budgets because the CIP information is presented more concisely.
- It seems as though there are changes in priorities. The budget priorities should align with the strategic plan and the funding allocations should connect with the priorities - e.g., describe where stadium renovations/press box fall in the strategic plan.
- The modernization plan background is needed; many of the CIP projects were front loaded and now it's not that way.
- There are so many things wrong and so many things needed in the city overall – such as sewer problems, transportation issues- but the city leaders ignored a lot of infrastructure needs in the past.
- The CIP should summarize what ACPS asked for and what we are actually awarded. The ten year CIP is a good planning tool but only the first year of the CIP is actually budgeted.
- The CIP is recommending the use of existing space but we haven't fully studied the pros and cons of this approach. Fairfax County Public Schools are using existing rental space and facing problems because there is no space for playgrounds, etc.
- Some of the recommended CIP projects represent big changes without any studies being shared for the reasoning behind the decisions
 - Consolidating Pre-K programs at one location
 - Focus on elementary school overcrowding and TCW but middle schools are said to be in worse crisis with overcrowding
 - TCW students using NOVA ... or some other campus possibilities
- There has been a lack of maintenance across the board and we have to get out of the cycle of searching for short-term solutions when we need a long-term plan.
 - Leasing schools is a short-term solution but what we need is more long-term solutions that have been studied along with other policy options so we can make decisions that will be best in the long-term.

- There was a plan that included students coming into Alexandria who might contribute to the current overcrowding and require special programs, due to language needs for example, but we don't hear much about immigration now.
- The perception of some members is that City Council members were not convinced enough about the needs put forth by the Schools (Board and Superintendent) so BAC might be able to help point out where the need statements need to be strengthened.

Priorities are important – The priorities of the City need to be what we value the most. Transportation is a big part of the city budget but residents do value education. We should examine the ways ACPS contributes to the priorities of the city because there are many. Advocacy has to be a different thing than this group, but BAC can point out where the budget document is not making a strong enough case. BAC members can point out what is needed – i.e., You haven't made a strong case here ... Where is the case weak, and where is the most urgency and thus the highest priority for the Board or staff to bolster the case?

BAC can set forth Priorities of what we are concerned about ... skeptical where? ... What should the Board fall on the sword for? The School Board has to be careful that what they say is what they demonstrate. For example, we often say we don't have enough money and student learning will suffer if we are not afforded the full amount requested. Inevitably, ACPS finds money in June or July whenever the City refuses to fully fund the requested budget amount. If ACPS doesn't get the money we want, we have to follow through on what we said we would do. – e.g., State that if ACPS is not fully funded, we will make the following budget changes which will have the following impact on teaching and learning Instead of having to make difficult budget cuts, usually, the staff finds money.

What is our reserve amount and how does it work? The City and ACPS staffs are currently working on a policy for this. Maybe we can find a way to allocate all budget efficiencies to the CIP fund. The schools are falling apart around us so we'll have to find some creative solutions.

Preparation for February Human Resources staff presentation – Steven Gordon distributed some slides that presented information about ACPS teacher attrition rates. BAC discussed:

- 16 percent turnover – per year – is high compared with other jurisdictions
- Staff exit interviews are helpful; one finding is that staff mainly leave due to the school leader and salary is no the highest contributing factor in leaving ACPS
- The high cost of replacing teachers; What are we doing to address the reasons staff leave? What are we doing to help school leaders recruit and retain high quality staff?
- Orientation and onboarding of teachers

Please send all questions to Steve in preparation for the Human Resources presentation and discussion next month. Janine Rubitski motioned to adjourn, seconded by Brett McParland, and the meeting closed at 8:45pm

Future Business and Dates - Next BAC Meeting: Tuesday, February 09, 2015