

**Budget Advisory Committee
October 4, 2021 at 6:30 PM**

Location: Zoom

MINUTES

Budget Advisory Committee Members Present: Nancy Drane (Chair); Selena el Hajji; Sukumar Rao; and Ryan Reyna

ACPS Staff Liaison Present: Robert Easley, Budget Director

School Board Liaison Present: Ramee Gentry, Board Member

Also in Attendance: Susan Neilson, Board Clerk

The meeting was called to order at 6:30 p.m. There were no public attendees and thus no public comments.

Approval of Prior Meeting Minutes – June 2021 minutes were approved as circulated.

Staff Report

- Mr. Easley started by referencing back to the 2020-2021 BAC Report and subsequent ACPS staff response. He clarified that the BAC report was well received and that the ACPS staff response was not meant as a detraction or distraction. In ACPS staff's view, it would be customary to submit a response to a report like this. (They do a management response after auditor reports, for example.) The intention was just to clarify a few points in the report – but ACPS views were largely in line with what BAC recommended. These recommendations were taken seriously by staff and are now being acted upon. ACPS staff appreciates BAC and the work that we do. ACPS staff's goal is to make sure that we are in sync moving forward.
- Budget and Finance staff are in regular meetings with ACPS communications staff and FACE team to explore ways to use the website, Express, Insider, and other platforms to provide financial and budget updates. The team wants to be more purposeful during the entire fiscal year (not just during budget season).
- ACPS staff would like BAC's help in using its resources to drum up feedback on the Community Forum on October 18 – which they'd like to call instead a "Budget Information Session." The event will provide a grounding on the budget process and how the budget impacts students, including a high level overview of the budget and its basic tenets. The content of the event will be rooted in the types of recommendations

that we made. BAC will get a draft copy of the presentation and how they plan to present it soon.

- With respect to the FY23 budget process, ACPS staff proposed several different calendars and the Board ultimately adopted a budget calendar that has the Board's vote before the City Manager releases his budget. The Board will vote on its FY23 budget priorities on Thursday, October 7.
- On Federal funding, ACPS has submitted its ESSER III application to VDOE; \$35M of Federal Funding, on top of \$15M in earlier ESSER funding received prior. VDOE is reviewing the application and will hopefully approve soon. The application has more detail on the four key areas that ACPS wishes to utilize ESSER funding: Social Emotional Academic Learning; COVID Mitigation (facilities); Human Capital Needs (additional staffing); and Technology Infrastructure Needs (enhanced technological environment). Re: staffing – are being clear that staffing investments are grant funded and may not be available after funding period of 3 years. The application is not yet publicly available, but will be once approved by VDOE.
- Q&A
 - Ms. Drane reiterated desire to work collaboratively, and the warm and productive relationship BAC has had with staff. We hope that we can continue to communicate openly and address any concerns, issues, etc. as early as possible and ideally, in advance, before any memo is submitted to the Board, etc.
 - There was a question about how ACPS is doing with hiring since many jurisdictions report struggling. Mr. Easley shared that it has been a challenge, and that ACPS is engaging some of the temporary staffing agencies to assist them with hiring; these relationships aren't new, but they're now reaching out for additional help with this challenge.

Board Update

- Ms. Gentry emphasized that there is certainly room for BAC and Staff to not agree on everything – but that open communication is key. Our work last year was really a model for other committees.
- She added that the ESSER plan will continue to evolve. For example, COVID testing has been added b/c ACPS will need to assume those costs after a state-funded pilot was delayed.
- She emphasized that the budget is a year round process, but with a lot happening now. For the CIP, this is a ten year budget; technically they'll be voting on next year this year. She doesn't expect big changes in CIP. Same for operating budget, as 88% of the budget is personnel related – not much left to work with – important concept for people to have in mind; particularly important in an election year. It is also important to remember that ACPS relies on over 80% of its funding from City of Alexandria.

- Finally, Ms. Gentry would like to think about how BAC might be a resource for incoming Board members.

Chair's Update

- Ms. Drane met with Kathy Stenzel, School Board liaison to City Budget and Fiscal Affairs Advisory Committee (BFAAC). She'd like to arrange a joint meeting, either before or after the joint meeting on October 27. The minutes of that meeting would effectively serve as a joint memo. She'd also like to think about areas of mutual interest, such as the CIP, out-of-school programming/capacity, etc.
- Ms. Drane has also reached out to PTAC. She will talk to PTAC Executive Board on October 6 to solicit feedback and ideas for the Community Budget Forum. BAC will be joining PTAC's October 20 meeting on broader budget engagement issues (more to come on that).

Old Business: 2020-2021 Closing Issues

- Ms. Drane solicited comments on the 2020-2021 End of Year Report and asked BAC members to provide by end of the week so that this can be submitted.

New Business: 2021-2022 Organizational Issues

- Brainstorm BAC 2021-2022 Scope of Work
 - With ACPS' interest in communications, community engagement and communications emerged as a good topic for BAC's 2021-2022 work.
 - We could make recommendations to ACPS about how it might best be more proactive about communicating budget related information and financial messaging so that the community has foundational information that they can use so that they are well informed in their advocacy.
 - Example: website has information buried and the information that is there is complicated – need more “bites” and “snacks” than “meals.” There is a huge trove of information, but need to put it out in a way that is more easily navigated by the public.
 - We might want to encourage “bite” and “snack” approach on certain topics as opposed to sections of the budget. For example, if people want elementary special ed information – it falls in many different parts of the budget.
 - It will be important for BAC to do outreach and secure end user feedback so that this isn't just what we think, but reflects community input.
 - Mr. Rao said that he wanted to be sure that whatever we do is helpful and meaningful to the Board and to staff.
- Community Budget Forum
 - Mr. Easley provided an overview of current plans. The topics they may cover include:
 - Level setting – e.g., the 88% -- start with “fast facts” or budget at a glance information (p. 17 of Budget Book)

- Board Budget Priorities
 - Budget Process – ACPS v. City; CIP v. Operating
 - ESSER Overview and Update
 - Orientation to currently available information
 - Highlight opportunities for public comment and ways to keep apprised of the budget process
- Ms. Drane encouraged Mr. Easley to share the draft outline, PowerPoint etc. with BAC members as soon as possible for comment and feedback.
- BAC will also help distribute information about the event.
- Review of BAC Meeting Schedule, Location, and other Events
 - ACPS has approved virtual meetings through January 2022. BAC members agreed to continue with virtual meetings as long as that option is available.
 - BAC members agreed to be as efficient as possible in scheduling meetings, recognizing that as we begin to draft memo, some work can be done outside of formal meetings. We are only required to meet quarterly. Ms. Neilson cautioned that substantive communication with a group of them may be deemed a “meeting” so we need to be careful about group communication. Ms. Drane agreed to circulate an updated list of proposed dates.
 - BAC Member Recruitment – Please consider whether there are others in your orbit that might be interested in serving on BAC.

Next Steps

- *2020-2021 End of Year Report* -- please provide any comments/edits by the end of this week
- *2021-2022 Scope of Work* -- please look out for an outline that we can edit and comment on along the lines that we discussed
- *2021-2022 BAC Meetings* -- please expect a revised meeting schedule along the lines of our discussion
- *Key dates:*
 - October 18 at 7:00 p.m. (via Zoom) - ACPS Budget Information Session (formerly Community Budget Forum) - link is here - <https://www.acps.k12.va.us/Page/2#calendar1/20211004/event/15117>
 - October 20 at 7:00 p.m. (via Zoom) -- PTAC Meeting - BAC has been invited to the PTAC meeting to meet with Alexandria's PTA leaders so that we can solicit some thoughts about communications around budget and fiscal affairs - link will be shared and all BAC members who are available are encouraged to attend

Adjournment

- With that, the meeting was adjourned at 8:00 p.m.