

White Plains Council of Neighborhood Associations
May Meeting

Tuesday, May 7, 2024

Location: Meeting Held on ZOOM

Time: 7pm

CNA Attendees: Michael Sanchez, Michael Dalton, Tom Osbeck, Ellen Berger, Anthony Fiorenza, Bob Friscia, Robert Kahn, Daniel Letizia, Leah & Howard Waldman, Shawn Woodford, Debra Zipf,

1. The Meeting was called to order by President Sanchez. President Sanchez introduced the meeting's topic: The 2024/25 White Plains School System Budget Presentation. President Sanchez introduced the guest speakers:
 - Dr. Joseph Ricca – Superintendent of Schools
 - Dr. Ann Vaccaro-Teich – Assistant Superintendent for Business & Operations
2. Dr. Ricca launched his School Budget presentation with a powerpoint slide deck that outlined the proposed School Budget's expenses and revenue for 2024/25. The 2024/25 proposed School Budget totals \$265.9 million...roughly a \$9.2 million increase over the 2023/24 Budget.
3. The largest expense in the proposed budget is Instruction (teacher compensation) which totals 52% of the expense budget. The 2nd largest expense is Employee Benefits (healthcare & pension) which totals 23% of the expense budget.
4. The largest revenue stream in the proposed budget is from Real Estate Tax Levies (local property taxes) which totals 76% of the school's revenue. The 2nd largest revenue source is State & Federal School Aid which totals 17% of the total revenue in the budget.
5. The proposed "Tax Levy" increase would be a 1.06% increase over 2023/24. NY State limits the annual Tax Levy increase for a school district to 2.26%. The City of White Plains estimates that the average School Tax will increase to homeowners will be 2.18%.
6. Dr. Ricca described the philosophy that guides the annual budgeting process at the School District:
 - Budget for REAL needs
 - Examine what is WORKING.
 - Examine what needs MODIFYING.
 - Ask "What Could We Strategically Abandon?"
 - Protect the Core curriculum.
 - Find Efficiencies
7. Regarding "Staffing Levels", Dr. Ricca explained that there are no major changes in the 2024/25 proposed budget. There are no planned reductions in the academic "programming" or in teacher "support". The proposed budget does include an increase in healthcare benefits of 10%....and Worker Compensation expenses are projected to increase 5%.
8. Additional Budgeting factors to be considered:
 - Servicing the School System Debt – Principal & Interest
 - Tax Centori – the reduction of taxes collected based on reduced assessed value of property.
 - Utilities costs
 - Property Insurance
 - Any 1-time expense

9. Approval of the proposed School Budget and Election of School Board members will take place on 5/21/24. As part of the budgeting process.... the School administration must prepare a contingency budget that would be adopted if the proposed budget is not approved on 5/21/24. The contingency budget for 2024/25 will require a \$2 million reduction from the proposed budget and would significantly impact the entire school budget. Dr. Ricca pointed out that the \$265 million budget will likely be voted on by approximately 1000 White Plains residents. He asked that we all encourage our neighbors to vote on 5/21.
10. The proposed budget increase of 1.06% is the lowest (percent) increase of any school district in the County.
11. On May 21, White Plains will hold a vote on the proposed school budget for 2024/25. The Board of Education will hold elections for new board members. There are 8 candidates to fill 3 open positions on the Board. In addition, the School District has asked voters to approve an increase in the school district's Capital Reserve Fund. The increase in the capital reserve fund to \$50 million will not involve an increase in school taxes for White Plains residents.
12. Michael Sanchez asked, "with the new downtown development in White Plains expected to add up to 20,000 new residents to the City....is the school system prepared for this growth?" Dr. Ricca explained that the School District monitors the anticipated impact of all new development projects and the likely impact to the student population...and then verifies these assumptions by auditing the "actual" number of students that come from specific development projects. The School administration also regularly meets with the City's administration to exchange information regarding areas that are likely to impact student populations. The total student population is projected to modestly decrease over the next decade...even with the additional population growth of the City.
13. Bob Friscia asked, "why did the school administrators chose to invest in another very costly artificial turf field at the high school?" Dr. Ricca explained that the degree of use on the sport field in question did not allow for natural grass to have a recovery period and that the best solution was to install artificial turf on that sports field.
14. Dan Letizia asked, "when will Kindergarten start?" Dr. Ricca responded, "a decision on the start date for Kindergarten has not been finalized.... but it will be soon."
15. Dr. Ricca explained that one of the unique aspects of the White Plains school system is that it does not "track" children. "Tracking" is a form of "pigeon holing" a student and the education that they receive at a specific level matching what is thought to be the student's potential. The school district understands that each student and their educational experience is unique. How well a student performs in one particular grade or class is not necessarily going to predict the outcome in another grade or class.
16. Dr. Ricca described the challenges of staff retention. WP Schools do not have an issue with attracting teaching candidates. The District is focused on attracting the "best and brightest". The District provides teachers with a variety of teacher development programs. Attracting and retaining a quality group of Substitute Teachers is challenging. The District's Teacher Recruitment effort is "National" in scope. WP recruits' teachers from across the entire nation. There is likely to be a teacher shortage over the next 10 years.
17. Shawn Woodford described the retirement of 2 long time school employees whose teacher coordinator positions were discontinued. The lack of loyalty on the part of the School District to these long-time employees upset parents at the school where the 2 coordinators worked. Dr. Ricca addressed this issue by first stating that the "change" that affected the 2 employees did not involve

“teachers in classrooms”. The employees involved were informed of the “change” months in advance. These same employees were also made aware that there were other job opportunities within the District that they could apply for. Finally, the Collective Bargaining Agreement for Administrators is different from those of Teachers. The “changes” that affected the 2 employees followed the rules of their CBA.

18. Bob Friscia asked why the School budget and Board Member vote was held on May 21 and could this vote date be revised. Dr. Ricca explained that in the past there had been some flexibility for setting the school budget voting. Currently, the date cannot be revised. The school budget and board voting date is set statewide by the NY State legislature.
19. President Sanchez thanked Dr. Ricca and Dr. Vacarro-Teich for their comprehensive presentation.
20. President Sanchez introduced the next topic for discussion: How to increase the participation of more neighborhoods in the CNA.
21. Bob Kahn stated that there are 26 neighborhoods listed in the proposed Comprehensive Plan for White Plains. Currently, there are 14 active dues paying neighborhood associations in the CNA. The CNA voice needs to be stronger. A number of steps were suggested to increase the participation of neighborhood associations in CNA:
 - Conduct a workshop to assist non-active neighborhoods form associations and then become members of CNA.
 - Create a CNA committee to attend Common Council meetings.
 - Rescind the City ordinance which prohibits lawn signs advertising neighborhood meetings & events in “public rights of way”. Lawns signs advertising an upcoming Highlands neighborhood event were removed by DPW personnel. Bob Kahn spoke with DPW Commissioner Mignone about this issue. Commissioner Mignone explained that lawn signs were removed because they violate a City ordinance that states lawn signs cannot be placed in “public rights of way”.
22. Bob Friscia watched the streaming feed of the April 16th Planning Board Meeting. He asked that CNA members watch the video feed of this meeting which discussed the proposed Comprehensive Plan, Sustainability, Affordable Housing & the Bike Program.
23. Michael Sanchez proposed a special CNA meeting in June to discuss concerns with the proposed Comprehensive Plan.
24. Michael Sanchez reported that the City of White Plains won a Downtown Revitalization Initiative grant of \$10 million. The City submits proposed projects for the grant monies to the State....and the State decides which projects get funded.
25. Howard Waldman discussed the need to get the clocks at the top of the Transit Center Clocktower repaired. The clocks not working reflect poorly on the City. Having the clocks restored and lit up at night is an advertising opportunity for a “sponsor” company to fund the repairs. Also, a repaired, working, lit up set of clocks at the top of the Clocktower sends the right message to anyone visiting White Plains.
26. Michael Sanchez discussed the issue of raising the CNA. Currently dues are set at \$25 per neighborhood association. Michael had proposed raising the dues this year...but, for now dues will remain at \$25. If your association has not paid its annual dues...please send your current dues payment to Tom Ozbek now.
27. President Sanchez thanked the attendees for their participation and then closed the meeting.