ADMINISTRATIVE BUDGET SESSION

MARCH 17, 2026

At an ADMINISTRATIVE BUDGET SESSION of the Town Council and School Committee of the Town of South Kingstown, County of Washington, in the State of Rhode Island, held at the Town Hall, in and for said Town on the 17th day of March 2026 at 7:02 PM.

PRESENT: Town Council
Rory H. McEntee, President
Michael K. Marran, Vice President
Patricia A. Alley
Deborah D. Bergner
Jay G. Wegimont

School Committee
Carol A. Vetter, Chairwoman
James L. Restivo, Vice Chairwoman
Michelle Brousseau
Kate M. Macinanti
Paula J. Whitford

School Committee Members Bradley Shear and Stewart Lander are absent.

Also present: James M. Manni, Town Manager; Brian Silvia, Finance Director;; Michael Podraza, School Superintendent; Daniel Seger, Assistant Superintendent; and Patricia Proctor, Chief Financial Officer, School Department.

1. WORK SESSION

A. The Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag is given.

B. The Land Acknowledgement Statement is read.

C. Michael Podraza, School Superintendent thanks the Town Council for their service to the community and reviews the proposed level funding of the School Department, key funding challenges, increasing costs, the decrease in relative value and purchasing power of the dollar as compared to 2020, and asks the Town Council to partner with the School Department to close the funding gap.

Mr. Podraza reviews the current status of the schools. He outlines the priorities and goals of the School Department to promote high expectations and equity, trust and respect, inclusive practices, and to ensure that student and family voices are heard. Enrollment statistics are presented by Mr. Podraza, noting that enrollment is projected at a total of 2,160 students for the 2026-2027 school year, down from the 2,175 students currently enrolled. It is further noted that historically students may join or leave the school population at the sixth and ninth grade levels as they enter or exit charter schools. There is no ability to collapse sections at the elementary school level due to class sizes already being at the maximum allowable limit, so if the projected number of kindergarten students joins the school population, staffing will need to be adjusted to accommodate an additional class. Staffing statistics from 2023-2024 forward are presented, along with proposed staffing reductions for the 2026-2027 school year. A total staffing cost reduction of $613,052 has been made through retirement replacements of four positions, leading to salary breakage and a reduction of $138,362, section attrition due to lower enrollment and four position eliminations, leading to a reduction in salary and benefits costs of $447,178, and one position reclassification, resulting in a further salary breakage reduction of $27,512. Despite reductions, there is a FY27 increase of 12.7% for health benefits, and an 8.6% increase in dental benefits, an overall increase of $15,939,747.

Mr. Podraza continues relative to the current and FY 2027 proposed Fund Balance. At the beginning of the FY 2026, the Fund Balance was in an amount of $4,714,993 and was reduced by $1,142,215 for School Capital Improvement Program (CIP) projects and $581,057 in encumbrances, leaving a remaining Fund Balance of $2,991,721. A projected amount of $1,000,000 is to be used to support FY 2027 operations, with a projected $1,991,721 remaining in total. He notes that the use of fund balance for operations in FY 2027 negates the District's ability to use the balance toward CIP projects. Fund balance scenarios are presented, showing outcomes if used for CIP versus operations.

Mr. Podraza presents external challenges to school funding. There has been a reduction in State aid in the amount of $398,550 due to the Governor's budget and funding formula, which calculates aid to municipalities based on community wealth as determined by property values and resident income as well as student population and needs. The reduction of State aid is the largest percentage decrease of any municipality in RI and fourth largest dollar reduction overall. School choice impact is presented with out of district enrollment history from the 2023-24 school year to the projected 2026-27 school year. FY 2027 projected expenses total $5,132,576 for out of district enrollment in charter, career and technical education (CTE), and State schools. Lastly, the School Department has contractual obligations to fulfill pending resolution in FY 2027 with one employment contract, South Kingstown Education Support Professionals (SKESP), and two purchased services contracts, a transportation contract with Ocean State Transit and food service contract with Chartwells, both expiring at the end of the 2025-26 school year.

Mr. Podraza reviews assumptions that the School budget is based on including the amounts of State and Federal aid received, employment contract increases of 2.5% for teachers through the National Education Association South Kingstown (NEASK), 2% for para-educators through SKESP, 2% for custodians through Council 94, and 2% for administration staff, health and dental benefits as originally projected before increases were announced, and other requests from Budget owners.

Patricia Proctor, Chief Financial Officer reviews revenue sources and amounts and expenditure sources and amounts.

Mr. Podraza presents a summary of shortfall causes and a FY 2027 request overview with the goal that no student programs are eliminated. He restates the reduction in School personnel costs of $613,052 and the intended use of the Fund Balance for operations in the amount of $1.0 million, and requests an increase in Town appropriation of $2.5 million.

Discussion ensues relative to a resolution of support sent by the Town Council and School Committee advocating for changes in the School Funding Formula, administrative staffing at Broad Rock Middle School and the High School, potential savings by altering school schedules, private donations and fundraising, school lunch costs, Rhode Island Department of Education (RIDE) reimbursement for CIP projects, the demolition of Curtis Corner Middle School and cost impact of no longer maintaining the school, and class sizes.

Further discussion ensues relative to level funding of the schools since 2020, personnel cuts, the impact to the tax rate of the School Department's $2.5 million request, the use of Bond Anticipation Notes (BANS) for the South Kingstown High School Building Project, and the need for additional State aid.

5. PUBLIC COMMENTS

Jennifer Nerbonne comments in opposition of the proposed School budget increase and tax rate increases for residents and emphasizes fiscal responsibility.

Josh Daly comments in support of finding a way to fund the schools and requests that the Town Council and School Committee continue to collaborate to find the appropriate resources.

Jim O’Neill comments on faculty levels at the schools, elimination of social security, the pilot tax received from Champagne Heights, and tiered taxation for residential and commercial real estate.

Bret Harrington comments on post-retirement health benefits for teachers, requesting the General Assembly to adjust allocations and the State aid calculation, the student to faculty ratio, and the declining school population.

Dorald Beasley comments on the Town Council’s Goals and Objectives, the lack of 5-star schools in Town, money spent on special needs students, declining school enrollment, and regionalization with Narragansett.

Laura Unknown comments on the voters’ passage of the school bond, the need for infrastructure upgrades to school facilities, recognizing that the Town and School are one budget that need to work in tandem, and remaining a robust and vibrant Town.

Libby Nestor comments in support of education and the budget that the School Department has put forward.

Council President McEntee expresses support for the South Kingstown schools and explains the next steps in the budget process.

Adjourn at 9:49 PM.

Emily R. Houle
Town Clerk