



CITY OF MELROSE

CITY COUNCIL

MINUTES • FEBRUARY 5, 2025

Council Chamber, First Floor, Melrose City Hall Joint Meeting with the School Committee
562 Main Street, Melrose, MA 02176

7:00 PM

I. CALL TO ORDER

City Council

Cal Finocchiaro -	Present
Mark Garipay -	Present
Ward Hamilton -	Absent
Maya Jamaledidine -	Present
Manjula Karamcheti -	Present
John Obremski -	Present
Devin Romanul -	Present
Robb Stewart -	Present
Kimberly Vandiver -	Present
Ryan Williams -	Absent
Leila Migliorelli, President -	Present

School Committee

Dorie Withey, Chair -	Present
Jen McAndrew, Vice Chair -	Present
Jen Grigoraitis, Mayor -	Present
Margaret Raymond Driscoll -	Present
Jennifer Razi-Thomas -	Present
Seamus Kelley -	Present
Matt Hartman -	Present

Pledge of Allegiance

II. PUBLIC COMMENT

Motion: To open and close Public Comment by unanimous consent
By: President Migliorelli, no objection, motion carried

Cecelia Auditore, parent, expressed concern about the large class sizes, teacher/staff cuts, and limited resources for the upcoming school year, and the long term consequences for students. **David Trzepacz**, parent, discussed the only option, which is to get behind an override. **Leslie Means**, teacher, shared that the future of our children and the entire community depends on the quality of education provided, she also talked about investing in education not only benefits the children, it leads to a stronger economy and more engaged and responsible citizens. **Joellen Beaudet**, teacher and Melrose resident,

talked about history in Melrose about twenty years ago when Melrose was in the process of closing two elementary schools and how Melrose needs to better fund our schools and do better this time so we can continue to be proud to be from Melrose. **Kerry Bryant**, parent talked about the wonderful experience her Kindergarten student has had this year and is worried if he'll have the support he needs in such a large class, and asked the Council what to talk to neighbors about and what should they advocate for so they can fund our schools. **Erin Grannemann** talked about investing in the future of the children in this community. **Patrick Griffin**, parent urged the Council to stop the narrative that we are not living within our means, these problems can not be solved by tightening our belts, he also urged the Council to be honest about what really needs to happen.

Erin Luca, parent, shared her concern about staying in a community that does not prioritize it's schools. **Alejandro Suarez**, parent, encouraged everyone to be proud to say yes to an override, this is an opportunity to put our schools first. **Jackie Mulgrew**, parent, discussed her concerns about the current special education services now, and is worried what's going to happen next year, kids deserve the education they are entitled to. **Mike McLaughlin**, parent, shared that the last override was not successful in part because of the mistrust in parts of the community with the City to manage it's finances. This room is energized, ready to campaign and act. **Andrea Topping**, parent, hopes the community can rally to afford basic educational opportunities, we are not asking for luxury, request to City Council to meet with the hard cuts that need to be made elsewhere in the community in order to fund our schools. **John Benner** said this is a community issue, we need to invest in our community. **Chris Gregg**, parent, son hasn't had a french teacher in three months, he is not learning in school, he worries that the system is already broken, and the budget shortfall for next year is enormous compared to previous years, we need to find a way to make it happen, more taxes for the future of our children.

III. COMMUNICATIONS FROM HER HONOR, THE MAYOR, AND OTHER CITY OFFICIALS

1. **(ID # 12425):** Joint Meeting of the City Council and the School Committee to be held at 7:00 p.m. on Wednesday, February 5, 2025, on the FY2025 operating budget and FY 26 budget forecast for the Melrose Public Schools and the City of Melrose

Mayor Grigoraitis and CFO Kerry Golden presented some foundational information on the current FY25 budget and the process to prepare for FY26. The Mayor shared that the School Committee will be having conversations next week, and the City Council will be in May. The Mayor talked about tonight's meeting as an opportunity to ask questions and express concerns.

The Mayor began by discussing the current FY25 budget, working on a \$104 million budget approved last June by School Committee and City Council, there was a failed override last June, and many cuts were made to the school department and city side last year.

CFO Kerry Golden, presented an overview of the current city budget for FY25. She talked about property taxes in Melrose as the largest revenue source, it is 71% of the budget, since the override was unsuccessful, they increased local receipts, it's not a lot of money, eliminated some positions, the City is in line with revenues where we were this time last year, and provided an overview of where things stand in FY25 currently. Looking at \$41 million given to the schools, that's the teaching and learning budget, that's not counting the budget that resides on the city side.

Director of Finance, Ken Kelley spoke to the \$41 million from the city, overall budget is over \$47.2 million, \$41 million from city and the schools generate their own revenue through tuition at ECC, fees, Ed Stations, and athletics, which makes up the different from \$41-47 million. FY 25 took a step forward and moved away from one time funding sources, it was a healthy financial move, however it created some hard decisions, as there were many cuts to reduce positions. FY25 had significant cuts in staffing and programming. The City put forth an override that was defeated which would have been an enormous help, but unfortunately caused a reduction of about 20 teaching staff.

Right now the schools are a lean corporation, not a lot of excess there, costs with leave of absences are a concern, contractual obligations, substitute coverage and the paid time off, there's a double cost associated with leaves. The schools' revenue is on target, they have increased fees, however biggest concern is ECC tuitions, as that is a fluid number.

School budget is composed of six categories: ECC, elementary level, middle school, high school, special education, and district wide administrative functions. We are on track right now, on track for FY 25, we froze our budget back on July 1, transportation costs rising is one of the biggest concern, overall goal to live within our balanced budget, avoid one time funding requests.

The Superintendent spoke to FY26 on the school side, sharing that his goal when he came to Melrose was to help make Melrose a world class public school district, at this point, we're trying to just meet federal and state compliance.

We face a \$4.2 million deficit, that would be, if we were approved, level services, where we keep everything we have in FY25, and carry it over to FY26. The override would have made the difference. Costs are increasing, teacher steps in lanes in contract, transportation costs, out of district tuition placements costs. We are currently missing key positions that exist in most

other districts that do not exist in Melrose. The only way to ameliorate that \$4.2 million deficit is with cuts. As we look at drivers for our budget, our primary driver is legal compliance. We have contractual obligations we have to meet, individual education programs we have to meet, we also need to think about student experience. The primary impacts will be larger class sizes, fewer people dealing with the issues on the day to day, negotiating with the contract, we did settle a one year successful contract, negotiated in one night, where everyone worked together and put in a lot of time.

The Superintendent talked about the countless hours he and the Director of Finance Ken Kelley have spent daily for the past weeks, working hard to ameliorate this deficit. There are going to be cuts and most of them are going to hurt. The Superintendent wants people at home to know that they are very strategic and intentional about the order of operations, and the order in which they are prioritizing, making cuts based on what is least harmful to students, families and staff. The more you get the numbers down, the harder it is to find more. There were rumors going around about closing schools, the Superintendent said that's the very last thing they want to do because it is the most harmful, it would be an absolute last resort. He is hopeful to open the doors in the next school year without closing any schools. They are looking at about 10% cuts across the board, looking at close to 40 teachers and five administrators.

The Superintendent shared that next Tuesday Feb 11th at the School Committee Meeting, he will provide an executive summary, an overview of where we are with more specifics given that night.

The Mayor spoke to next steps on the city side, no more than 45 days prior to June 30th, she will deliver a budget to the City Council for consideration. The Mayor also talked about creating a Finance Task force to start planning for a menu of options to consider for additional funding through an override, as we do not have the revenue, we need this to deliver the services people expect and deserve.

President Migliorelli thanked all who spoke and opened up for questions from the City Council and School Committee.

RESULT:	NO ACTION TAKEN
TO:	City Council

IV. ADJOURNMENT

Motion: To Adjourn

By: President Migliorelli, no objection, meeting adjourned at 9:30 PM.